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**NEW WRITING AND DAYLIGHT**  
**(1945—VI)**



*All communications should be addressed to John Lehmann  
at The Hogarth Press*



# **NEW WRITING AND DAYLIGHT**

**1945**

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*The quotations from C. K. Scott Moncreff's translation  
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# In Daylight—I

By JOHN LEHMANN

## I

THE last few months have taught us again that bad habits are not always self-indulgent habits. Apprehension, pugnacity, fatalism are all bad states of mind, which most of us would rather be without ; but the war turned them into habits, and when VE-week arrived, as unsensationally as an English river turning a corner into a new landscape, we found they were very difficult habits to break. The fist had been clenched for so long that the muscles resisted relaxation ; some of us in London found it difficult even to control the automatic glance for cover when we heard a hooter sounded from the river.

We are still dazed, we still find we are reluctant to recognize the fact of peace and to assess the kind of world the earthquake has left us to live in, the kind of Britain, the kind of Europe to which Britain, the Janus country, must, with one face, always look for partnership. The fact that Europe itself is equally dazed, and still suffering extremely from its own brands of war-hangover, both psychological and material, does not make the task of assessment easier. Conclusions one arrives at now, in 1945, must inevitably be tentative ; but the questions to be answered are nevertheless urgent, and we should try, however inadequately, to begin to find our way to the answers. And the most urgent of all the questions is : Can Europe find an integration of thought and belief that will prevent it from further near-mortal strokes—strokes that paralyse an eye or arm and almost certainly in the end will kill—and if so, by what strength and from what source ?

If any integration is to take place, one condition is essential : a peace that is more than just a truce as short as, or even shorter than, the truce between the first and second world wars. Crudely put, that peace depends for Europe on harmony between Britain and America on the one side, and Russia on the other. Leaving aside all the problems involved in the adjustment of essential strategic and economic interests (and if other things are equal, these will never be insoluble), we can see that that harmony itself depends on the *possibility* of integration. And here the first disturbing feature of the post-war landscape emerges into view : it is becoming harder with every week that passes not to recognize that Soviet Russia and the Western democracies think and value in different ways. Even to say that, is to illustrate the point at once ; for by Soviet Russia we can only mean the official voice of the bureaucracy, the same voice however many throats it may use as its channel, while by the Western democracies we mean something more complex, a balance between government and people, between tradition and creative impulse.

between one point of view and another, in which ethical scruples and metaphysical perplexities play a never negligible part. In his recent book, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, Arthur Koestler has defined and documented this difference, building up an argument that remains convincing as a whole even if we allow for a certain extremism and exaggeration of detail. That dangerously imprecise word 'democracy,' and the common will to defeat Nazi Germany, obscured the extent of the gulf for much of the time between June 1941 and May 1945; but the Polish crisis and the advance of the Red Army westwards from its pre-war borders forced us to notice it with increasing anxiety. This huge problem looms over Europe's future: how can integration be achieved if on one side of a line drawn across it the rights of free criticism of authority, of free philosophical speculation and free political association are observed in an atmosphere where most grievances can be sooner or later made public and moral principles have an absolute value—however economically insecure the resulting pattern of existence may be,—and on the other side all these rights are denied, in an atmosphere almost totally impenetrable to publicity, where moral principles are a matter of political expediency—however economically secure the state of society aimed at may be? In spite of superficial signs to the contrary, Russia and the West do not talk the same language of civilization at the moment. Are Dostoevsky and Shakespeare strong enough to break the barrier down?

## 2

While the fog of political uncertainties obscures the once great centres of Central European culture, Vienna and Prague, it is impossible to tell what part they could play in a future European integration. The ruined Vienna of the inter-war years, skimmed so largely of its enterprise and talent by the capitals of countries more prosperous than the Austrian Republic, seemed an almost negligible factor in European civilization, a poor demoded actress kept going by gifts from those who remembered and sentimentalized about her heyday of fascination. And yet in that Vienna, with its unemployment, its half-silent streets, the dowdy but devoted public that never had enough shillings in its pocket to make the state-supported opera and theatres a paying proposition, the essentials of European civilization still conditioned the life of the people, and more effectively perhaps, in spite of the exacerbations of civil conflict, than in other, more 'go-ahead' parts of the West. 'Human respect! Human respect! There is the touchstone . . .' cried Antoine de St. Exupéry in *Letter to a Hostage*. And it was human respect that one found in Vienna so abundantly, a belief in the value of the individual, of every individual equally in the light of eternity, and in the reality of spiritual values, which combined with the Austrian wit and cos-

metropolitan tolerance could still be so precious if brought back into the bloodstream of our culture. In Prague, too, in the more vigorously creative atmosphere of a young nation, in spite of occasional attacks of an almost insular conceit which we in Britain certainly cannot afford to be superior about, the same values flourished; and if one missed the subtle Viennese wisdom and lightness of touch, one found instead a stronger will to assimilate and to fuse what was best in the sister traditions of East and West. Europe needs the spirit of Prague and Vienna still, not transformed by a new totalitarian fanaticism—however benevolently its aim may be interpreted—but restored and strengthened in themselves; as it needs the luminous artistic passion of Greece which can still, as if by no greater effort than that of daily speech, suffuse man and nature with an intense and mysterious significance, and can survive, as we see in the beautiful poems of Angelos Sikelianos, George Seferis and other Greek poets of today, even the most tragic alien oppression and internal discord. It would be a sorry day for Europe if the voice of Greece, that miraculous civilization which by its whole nature and tradition cannot flourish in any purely materialist atmosphere or under any regimenting dogma, were ever to be silenced again.

## 3

The exciting uncovering of France started long before VE-week, even before the landings of the Summer of 1944, with the arrival of Aragon's *Crève-Cœur* in this country. The cultural France that has been revealed to the returning Anglo-Saxons has changed in almost everything except in its fundamental devotion to the things of the mind: there are new writers and new trends of thought, and though their origins can certainly be traced to pre-war days, they did not then dominate the scene as they appear to, as seen from London, today. There are many new magazines, some of which began publication clandestinely under the German occupation, and their pages are filled with eloquent rhetoric, in prose and verse, on every subject under the sun; perhaps to a degree that may cause a certain disappointment to Englishmen who have managed to get through the war with a minimum of eloquence (only Churchill was off the ration), and look especially, among the many permutations and combinations of the same authors' names, for the creative imagination at work: for the poem that burrows a little below the patriotic and revolutionary emotions of the day,\* for the story that may still be alive as a story ten years hence.

One of the reasons for this lack may be that the short story has temporarily gone out of fashion in France. It is among novels and

\* I do not mean to suggest by this that there are no such poems. On the contrary, it is clear that even after a vigorous sifting very beautiful work by Paul Eluard, Loys Masson, Patrice de la Tour du Pin and other poets remains.

plays that we find plenty to interest and stimulate us ; and in these fields, in spite of the publication of distinguished works by well-known authors such as Malraux, Chamson, Bernanos, the focus of our attention inevitably falls on the group of so-called 'existential' writers, whose leading exponents are Sartre and Camus, both also leaders of the intellectual 'Resistance.' It is possible, of course, to make too much of the influence of a new school of philosophy when we are considering creative writers. The thought of Kierkegaard and his followers has been in the European air for many decades, and has even blown across to our own islands ; and poets and novelists generally take to a philosopher because he answers to and clarifies something already existing in their view of life. The danger is to assume that the poems and the novels are simply *illustrations* of the new philosophic doctrine ; in the case of artists like Sartre and Camus, who are also critics of philosophy themselves, the assumption is more pardonable ; nevertheless, no genuinely creative work of art can be defined or confined in such a manner. And nobody who has read them can have much doubt that such works as Sartre's *Les Mouches* and *Huis Clos* and Camus's *L'Etranger* do indeed belong to this creative category.

After the orgy of Satanism in action through which we have just passed, the crying need of Europe is for a new humanism, for a re-affirmation, in all the manifestations of culture, of the dignity of man—of every man—for the philosophy that recognizes that man is a spiritual being, and that no man has a right to treat another man as mere experimental material, a soulless instrument to be expended in the service of false absolutes, the supremacy of race or nation or class. World history in this century is a ghastly moral written in the blood of millions of human beings, a reeking demonstration of the place to which such doctrines lead us as reject the principle of love and deny any law above their own. The horrors revealed in the camps of Belsen, Buchenwald and Dachau were not just the crimes of the German nation or the Nazi party : they were the logical result of *any* way of thinking which demands the atrophy of the imagination. The truth of Shelley's inspired words in his *Defence of Poetry* has never been clearer than to-day : 'A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively ; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others. . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination.' So, conversely, if he refuses to use his imagination where a doctrine of race or nation or class stands in his way, he has not far to go before he perpetrates great evil.

The imagination, as Shelley uses the term, is an aspect of love. 'The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of ourselves. . . .' The integration of Europe cannot come on any other basis of belief than this ; and it is the anti-humanistic trend in the work of so many brilliant French writers of the new generation that is disturbing.—

whatever its roots, in existential philosophy or some deeper impulse of the contemporary French mind. Discussing the fantasy novels of Henri Michaux, Mr. Philip Toynbee writes: 'We are shocked by the failure to subscribe even to our most fundamental notions of sense and value,' and, later, of one in particular, *Un Certain Plume*, that it can be read 'simply as a wild fantasy on the misfortunes of the humble little man, though the violent sadism of some passages should be a warning against any simplicity of approach.' To destroy our ordinary 'notions of sense and value' seems also to be the aim of Sartre in some of his most remarkable work. In *Les Mouches*—a play which I have not had the good fortune to see on the stage but which I found enthralling to read as no other play I can remember of recent years—the great climax comes when, Electra having failed to carry through her act of defiance to conscience-and-custom-ridden Argos and Jupiter its god, Orestes is left alone, and to Jupiter who reminds him that he made him and can therefore claim sway over him as over every other creature on earth, replies: 'Yes, you made me: but you did not have to make me free.' A fine answer; equally fine his remark a few moments later: 'human life begins on the further side of despair.' But to what does this freedom, this power of beginning a new, a real life after despair has been met and known, lead in the end?—To Orestes' departure for Argos, alone and proud, indifferent to the Furies and the flies that pursue him. Orestes has renounced society, despising it for its taboos and scruples, to be himself—by himself. How different this cold and isolated triumph from the climax of Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea*, where Hilda, who has also longed to break away from the prison of her human condition to follow her 'Stranger,' suddenly realizes, when her husband tells her she is free, that this freedom to choose makes her home responsibilities no longer prisonlike but desirable, a field for love to work in and reach fulfilment. In Camus's *L'Etranger* the hero is inspired by an absolute refusal to simulate emotion or respect that he does not feel; and he goes to his death almost entirely because of this integrity. The theme is excellent, and Camus, a highly talented writer, extracts comedy and terror from it. But the fact remains that the hero is a cold fish, and it is difficult to be moved by the determination of a cold fish to remain cold. In his great outburst at the end he rails against society for expecting him to be affected by 'the death of others, the love of a Mother,' and claims that the laws of society have nothing to do with his destiny. How different the final outburst against society of the hero of Dostoevsky's *A Gentle Maiden*. His agony arises from his realization that he has tried to be cold, has dehumanized himself out of spite and wounded pride, and has so caused the death of a human being he loved; and in his agony he sees that the horror of the society he knows comes from its coldness, its silence in the face of

love : almost precisely the opposite conclusion to that of *L'Etranger*.

## 4

When we turn from the Parisian scene to London, which by comparison the Editor of *Horizon* finds 'a grey, sick wilderness on another planet' populated by writers whose characteristics are 'irritable lassitude, brain-fatigue, apathy and humdrummery,' we cannot help noticing that what these irritable and apathetic writers have produced during the war, fragmentary though it may be if put against the work that has issued from less explosion-shaken capitals, is striking rather for its humanism. If we take our most distinguished poets it is especially noticeable that they have grown more human rather than less human ; though in the case of T. S. Eliot it would be wrong to suggest that the *Four Quartets* are anything but the latest stage in the unhurried development of a thought long inspired by the main Christian and Virgilian elements in Western civilization. In Edith Sitwell's *Street Songs* and *Green Song* the note of human compassion is at times almost unbearably poignant ; the dignity, the tragic beauty of the human condition in the midst of suffering, error and death pervades the poems that Cecil Day Lewis collected in *Word Over All*, and Stephen Spender in *Ruins and Visions* ; the faith in what is human, against all the fatally dazzling simplifications of dogma and fanaticism and self-interest, is movingly stated in the conclusions to Louis MacNeice's long poem *The Kingdom* :

These are the people who know in their bones the answer  
To the statesman's quiz and the false reformer's crude  
Alternatives and ultimatums. These have eyes  
And can see each other's goodness, do not need salvation  
By whip, brochure, sterilization or drugs,  
Being incurably human ; these are the catalytics  
To break the inhuman into humanity ; these are  
The voices whose words, whether in code or in clear,  
Are to the point and can be received apart from  
The buzz of jargon. . . .

*The Kingdom* is not, perhaps, as a whole, the most successfully articulated, though the longest and most ambitious, of the poems in *Springboard*. In other, shorter poems, such as *Explorations*, *Mutations*, *Brother Fire*, *Convoy*, *Neutrality*, *Alcohol* and *Springboard* itself, Louis MacNeice defines a philosophy richly aware of the paradoxes, surprises and complexities of life, revealing an adult mind of great penetrative power and integrity, working to its discoveries through the tragic experiences of these years. It is not such a brilliant virtuoso display as Auden's *For the Time Being* (of which a perceptive analysis has been made in this issue by Mr. Henry Reed), but, to one reader at any rate, it is very much more effective as *poetry*, not merely because

'it is more sensitively creative in its use of words and images, but because, avoiding the aridly cerebral, it is evolved, as all the greatest works of poetic art, from the action of the human intelligence as it combines with human feeling and imagination.

## 5

Britain, if she has a political mission of reconciliation and restoration in ruined Europe, has also a cultural mission no less important. It is no impertinence to her great Allies, in the East and the West, to assert that her ancient civilization, so deeply steeped in all that brought continental Europe to its finest moments of florescence, and at the same time parent of the new civilizations that have grown up in the last two centuries across the oceans, can contribute more than any other to the spiritual reintegration without which this war will seem, in a few decades, to have been a mere wasting of treasure that can ill be spared, a mere acceleration in the toboggan-slide towards the pit. Arthur Koestler calls for a 'Western revolutionary humanism' to rescue us from totalitarian night; I would say rather that it is an *evolutionary* humanism that will save us, and that Britain is peculiarly fitted, if her intellectuals will cease to grovel before foreign cultures but rather respect them as enrichments of her own superlatively fertile culture, and if she will never forget that the sufferings of Europe during this war have altogether eclipsed her own, to be the guide and inspiration of such a humanism. It was Michael Polyani, the distinguished scientist to whom *The Yogi and the Commissar* is dedicated, who said, in a remarkable broadcast talk last year: 'My generation—the generation of modern intellectuals to which I belong—entered on its heritage at the beginning of this century with immense hopes for the future. Science was our Pole-star. Guided by science we were determined to make a clean sweep of all ancient stupidities. . . . In our eyes Victorian England was a curious sort of anachronism. Here, we were told, still survived scientists who believed in God; and the great Charles Darwin himself had been a religious believer. Labour leaders in Britain preached in Church, and highly educated people kept worrying about the opinion of bishops on birth control. They seemed not to have heard of class war; nor of the discovery that morality is a purely conventional matter and that physical power alone is a real force in history. . . . However, some of us have travelled a long way since those early days. Today I feel that if the English-speaking nations were backward in accepting the modern Continental views, they were backward only on a path of error and disaster. I think now that their kind of backwardness has probably saved Britain and America from national disintegration and from the fate of totalitarian subjection which many great peoples of the Continent were doomed to undergo. . . .'



It is, of course, not only by her poetry that England can take the lead in a new European humanism ; the art of two of the greatest of this century's novelists, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, is profoundly significant in this respect, and has been recognized by Europe ; but it is above all by her poetry, that matchlessly ancient and vigorous evergreen in the culture of the West. ' Poetry,' says Cecil Day Lewis in *Poetry for You*, one of the freshest and most stimulating introductions to poetry written in our time,\* ' is the greatest glory of our nation, though you don't often find it mentioned in the history books. Your geography book tells you about our exports—iron, coal, woollen goods, etc.—but never mentions that one of our most famous exports is poetry. . . . Every civilized nation has recognized that poetry is the art in which England excels : our poets are as famous abroad as our sailors and our industrial craftsmen.' The work that has been begun by the British Council during the last few years will have to continue far into the future if English poetry is to be understood and loved abroad, and it must be supplemented by the responsibility of British intellectuals towards their own culture in all their dealings with their colleagues in other countries ; but it can be no one-way traffic ; exports, for the health of a nation, should be balanced by imports, and we need to keep our minds open to the message that the poets of Paris and Athens and the other great cities of civilization send us if we want our literary life to have the vitality and richness of the age of Chaucer, or of Shakespeare, or the Romantics, when England indulged in such abundant friendly plundering of Europe's intellectual life. Poetry is the most difficult of arts to communicate to a foreign country, because of its almost untranslatable nature ; but as, to take one excellent example, Dr. Bowra's *Heritage*

\* It is in striking contrast to a book recently put on the market, by a Mr. C. L. Boltz, the avowed object of which is to persuade a young man and his young lady, both in the Forces, that they need not giggle or feel embarrassed (as apparently both of them did and the author as well) when quoting Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark*. There are certainly some interesting suggestions in *Crown to Mend*, as Mr. Boltz calls his book, which might stay the giggles ; but it would be difficult to imagine a more misleading primer for any young person seriously enquiring into the nature of poetry, and in particular into the nature of English poetry. Mr. Boltz's judgements on some of our greatest poets are a good sample of the quality of his mind. In one chapter devoted to a nimble historical survey of poetry, speaking of Byron, he says that he was ' a deformed aristocrat with a taste for rolling rhythms, who wrote far too much topical work of no interest to us and tried to write long poems.' Having thus polished off the author of *Don Juan*, he flings Keats and Shelley after him, conceding only that they ' now count as major poets, we know, but contributed nothing sufficiently original to the main course of our poetry to merit further discussion in this short account.' In his next chapter, entitled *Schools, Movements, Labels*, he lights on a good modern reason for mentioning Marlowe : ' Of all the University wits the best known is Marlowe, who was killed in a tavern brawl ; one of his plays was revived not long ago for broadcasting.' O lucky Kit ! Not so lucky William Shakespeare, of whose Sonnets in one place Mr. Boltz remarks : ' Altogether there are 154 sonnets by the same poet, and it is not necessary to read them all.' It can only be added that it is not necessary to read *Crown to Mend*, with its farrago of superficial, ill-informed, and impertinent views, at all.

of *Symbolism* carries us into an intimacy with a whole movement of European poetry we could never have attained by translation alone, so such works of re-interpretation and re-discovery as have recently been written by Dr. E. M. W. Tillyard on *Shakespeare's Historical Plays* and Dr. J. C. Smith on *Wordsworth*—on the two poets who have most to contribute to the understanding of the strange phenomenon of our culture—can do as much to bridge the channel to our European friends as to teach ourselves to value the true nature of our inheritance. And we should not forget that such interpretation of the past by itself can never be enough : the true proof of the significance of a tradition is that it should still be alive, and the propagation of British poetry abroad should be balanced by the persistent, serious and imaginative encouragement of British poets, live ones, at home.

June, 1945.

## The Two Loves

By EDITH SITWELL

*To Pavel Tchelitchev and his work in progress.*

### I

THE dead woman black as thunder, upright in the Spring's great shroud  
Of flowers and lightnings snows and sins and sorrows, cried like the loud  
Noise of Spring that breaks in heart and bud. . . .

' Oh should you pass,

Come not to this ground with your living lass :

For I have a light to see you by !

Is it the Burning Bush—

Is it Damnation's Fire . . .

Or the old aching heart with its desire ?

I only know I tried to bless—

But felt that terrible fire burn to the bone—

Beneath Time's filthy dress.'

### II

But where are the seeds of the universal Fire

To burn the roots of Death in the world's cold heart ?

The earth of my heart was broken and gaped low

As the fires beneath the equator of my veins.

And I thought the seeds of Fire should be let loose

Like the solar rains—

The light that lies deep in the heart of the rose ;

And that the bloom from the fallen spring of the world

Would come again to the cheek grown famine-white

As winter frost—

# Lament

By GEORGE BARKER

## I

THE fury this Friday burst through my wall  
With a death certificate in its hand.  
Bright, bright, Elipsion, burn to-night  
Across the sky and tell the whole  
Empty and insignificant world that I grieve  
For a tall Jack with the sun on his wrist  
And a sky stuffed up his sleeve. Let me leave  
Love on the mantelpiece looking East  
To gather together the dust that I have lost,

## II

They walk in silence over the same spaces  
Where they once talked, and now do not,  
The dumb friends with the whitewashed faces  
Who lifted a hand and died. They forget us  
In the merciful amnesia of their death,  
But by us, the disremembered, they cannot  
Ever be forgotten ; for always, in all places,  
They can rise eloquently up to remind us  
Of the inalienable allegiances behind us.

## III

My love, my love, why do you leave me alone ?  
My love, my love, where, where are you gone ?  
Here the tall altitudes grieve as they gaze down  
Knowing that you, elusive their lover, are gone  
And that you will never again  
Kiss the hands of the morning at a vivid four hundred,  
Uncurling, at nine angels, the splendid  
Wake upon which you walk gold across the sky.  
Grieving, like them, I cannot believe it is ended.

## IV

Remember the eye that haunts me for ever  
Wherever I am, under any sky,  
O completely from leaf and smiling from over  
Every horizon he looks at me.  
The simple sea shall fold its sad arms

Less long about the world  
Than I shall hold him in my dreams  
Until every instant seems  
To reclaim part of him.

V

Here by the salt tide at the South  
That washes its coils along  
The coast that lies behind the eyes,  
His wreck is like a rock in my mouth  
With his body on my tongue.  
The salt that at the lashes of  
All Seven Seas laces the shores,  
Grazing my weeping eye of sores,  
Engenders the more of Love.

VI

Time with its shoving shall unsmooth  
The brightest lying lover  
And in the teeth of human truth  
Prove that the heart needs more than faith  
To help it to recover  
The love that took a look at death  
And promised me for ever :  
As, under Northern seas, his face  
Fades as the seas wash over.

VII

My love, my love, lift up your joystick hand,  
Dismiss the dividing  
Grief. Bring, bring again the kiss and the guiding  
Glory. From his hiding  
Place in the cleft of the cloud, O dove of evening,  
Lead him back over that dark, that intervening  
Day when he died, lead him back in a loving  
Return to this room where I  
Look out and see his death glittering in the sky.

VIII

The killers shall spring into each other's arms  
And, sighing, the hate subside ;  
The catalytical shall kiss, and the relief  
Wrap cities in mutual belief,  
And the dove preside.

## ISLAND DANCES

And all but this tall one and the dead  
 Shall feel the warming of the world  
 Running through every board and bed  
 Colder because they died.

## IX

Sleep, long and beautiful, in that bag  
 Where loneliness, my tall falcon,  
 Will never again cheat you with the mirage  
 Of sensual satisfaction.  
 Look, look, the grave shakes over his head  
 And the red dirt stands up, as  
 Across existence I beg him heed :  
 To those that love there are no dead,  
 Only the long sleepers.

## Island Dances

By **GEORGE SEFERIS\***

*Translated by Nanos Valaoritis*

Santorin is geologically composed of pumice-stone and china-clay ;  
 in her bay . . . islands have appeared and disappeared. This  
 island was once the birthplace of a very ancient religion. The  
 lyrical dances of a strict and heavy rhythm performed here were  
 called *ὑμνοπαίδια*.  
(*The Guide to Greece.*)

## I

## SANTORIN

STROOP if you can to the dark sea forgetting  
 The sound of a flute on naked feet  
 Stepping on your sleep in the other the sunken life.

Write if you can on your last shell  
 The day the name the land  
 And fling it in the sea that it may sink.

We stood naked on pumice-stone  
 Watching the islands rising,  
 Watching the red islands sinking

\* George Seferis, the son of a professor of international law at Athens University who translated Byron into modern Greek, is one of the most distinguished of the younger Greek poets. He has published several volumes of poems, translations from T. S. Eliot, and a number of essays in periodicals. He is in the diplomatic service and has lived in many European capitals.

In their sleep in our own sleep  
 Standing naked here  
 We held the scales that were falling  
 In favour of Wrong.

Instep of power, unshadowed will, disciplined love  
 Plans that ripen in noontide sun  
 Avenue of Fate with the clapping of a new hand  
 On the shoulder ;  
 In a land that crumbled enduring no longer  
 In a land that once we possessed  
 The islands are sinking ashes and rust.

Ruined altars  
 The friends forgotten  
 Palm-leaves in mud.

Allow your hands to travel if you can  
 Here on the curve of time with the ship  
 That touched the horizon.  
 When the dice struck on the slab  
 When the lance struck on armour  
 When the eye discovered the stranger  
 And love grew dry  
 In pierced souls ;  
 When looking around you see  
 Feet reaped in a circle  
 Hands dead in a circle  
 Eyes dark in a circle ;  
 When there is no choice any longer  
 Of a death which you seek for your own,  
 Listening to a yell  
 Even the yell of the wolf  
 Your own justice ;  
 Allow your hands to travel if you can  
 Unfasten from treacherous time  
 Let yourself sink,  
 Must sink who carries the great stones.

## II

### MYCENÆ

Give me your hands, give me your hands, give me your  
 hands.  
 I saw in the night  
 The sharp peak of the mountain  
 I saw the plain flooded

## ISLAND DANCES

In the light of an invisible moon  
I saw, on turning my head,  
Black stones huddled  
And my life stretched like a cord  
The beginning and the end  
The last moment ;  
My hands.

Must sink who carries the great stones ;  
These stones I have carried as long as I endured  
These stones I have loved as long as I endured  
These stones, my destiny.  
Wounded by my own soil  
Tortured by my own garment  
Condemned by my own gods  
These stones.

I know they know not, although  
I have often followed  
The path from killer to victim  
From victim to vengeance  
From vengeance to another crime  
Feeling my way  
Through the unexhausted purple robe  
That night of homecoming  
When the Furies started whistling  
In the scarce grass  
I have seen the snakes coupled with vipers  
Woven over the fated generation  
Our destiny.

Voices from stone from sleep  
Deeper there where the world darkens  
Memory of toil rooted in rhythm  
Striking the earth with feet •  
Forgotten  
Naked bodies buried in foundations  
of another time. Eyes  
Concentrated, concentrated on a sign  
You can no longer discern  
And the soul  
That strives to become your soul.

Even the silence is no longer yours  
Here where the millstones have halted.

# I Hear You Say So

By ELIZABETH BOWEN

A WEEK after V.E. Day, the nightingale came to London—unnoticed until it began to sing. It pitched itself in a tree in a north-west park. Until the first notes were heard, the warm night had been remarkably still ; the air was full of lassitude after the holiday and of emanations of the peace—which, like any new experience, kept people puzzled and infantile. It was now about half-past ten : the rose garden in the centre of the park had been closed and locked, leaving the first roses to smoulder out unseen as dark fell. The whistle had sounded from the boathouse and the last oars had stopped splashing upon the lake ; the waterbirds one by one were drawing in to settle among the dock leaves round the islands. The water, which had dulled as the sky faded, now began to shed, as though it were phosphorescent, ghostly light of its own. From all round it came the smell of trodden exhausted grass. After sunset, the sky held for so long an intense liquid and glasslike whiteness that people began to wonder if, after all, this might be going to be a Polar night : just now no miracle seemed impossible. The air did darken, but it remained transparent : couples walking together or standing on the bridges never quite ceased to discern one another's features, or the white reflections from the north in one another's eyes. Those lying down, however, became blotted into the monotone of the grass.

In streets outside the park and here and there along the terraces round it there still hung victory flags. Householders were unwilling to take them in, and passers-by were unwilling to see them go. This tense and aimless, tired and tender evening loved the directive of the remaining flags, whose colours one gradually could not see. Stripes, crosses, stars, and swags of bunting showed with lymphatic softness against the evening-hardened faces of the buildings ; but the flags that were stretched on lines or hung out on poles stirred now and then, over the windless perspectives of the streets, as though their own existences gave out breath. Best of all, outside a gate of the park, one flag was dipped back at a corner into its own colours by being caught in the ray from a lighted window.

High up, low down, the fearlessly lit-up windows were like exclamations. Many stood wide open. Inside their tawny squares the rooms, to be seen into, were sublimated : not an object inside them appeared gimcrack or trivial, standing up with stereoscopic sharpness in this intensified element of life. The knobbed or fluted stem of a standard lamp, the bustlike curves of a settee, the couples of photographs hung level, the fidgeting of a cockatoo up and down its perch, the balance of vases on brackets and pyramids of mock fruit in bowls



'dodging past the row of behinds and observed the light from a window flickering stealthily in his glasses.

'Hi, Mum,' he said, joggling her elbow, 'I seen a burglar.'

She was pushing her pompadour back with her other hand, saying to her sister : 'Who would have thought it, really.'

'Really, you'd think it knew.'

The sister's husband said : 'They don't know the difference. Ever so many of them we had out in France in the last war. Sang the guns down. One we had in a copse, it kept us awake three nights. Great fat bird, by the sound. Were we fed up.'

'Where was the corpse then, Oswald ?'

'Copse, Kathleen. Out there in No Man's Land.'

'Ah, well.'

'Hi, Mum——'

'—Stop pulling. Don't be so awkward. Listen.'

'Why ?'

'Uncle Os's been telling you : that's a nightingale.'

The boy began to whimper : 'But I thought the war was over.'

The mother, with jocular fondness like a she-bear's, pushed the boy's cap forward over his face, explaining meantime to her sister Kathleen : 'He's disappointed he didn't see the floodlights.' She attended to a few more notes, then said : 'How it keeps it up. Funny in London, when you come to think.'

'Nothing,' Kathleen said, 'seems funny to me now. Not after everything we've been through. It's all one to me what I hear now, I tell you frankly, provided it isn't a siren.'

'I've heard lions roar off of this bridge,' said Uncle Oswald.

'I'd soonest a siren,' said the little girl, pertly ducking and weaving under their elbows. She started imitating the nightingale, and the party, somewhat relieved, laughed, and laughing trooped off the bridge towards the gateless gate of the park.

The boy's burglar-man had not, after all, left the range of song. He stood staring about him, trying to calculate its effect on other people. At this side benches were spaced out, facing the lake across a wide asphalt walk : each bench was extinguished into darkness by having the canopy of a tree. It could here and there be seen, and always sensed, that not a bench was empty ; and the physical intensity of each silence was disturbing to the neurotic man. Ever since railings had been taken away, he had not ceased to brood on what must be the consequences, nor had he ceased frequenting the night parks. Now a big dog, like a bad spirit, ran past him and all along the seats, head down, in silhouette against the grey of the lake. All the time, the nightingale paused and sang.

Now a car, a plough of powerful light, swept round the road that swept round the park. The headlamps floodlit the seats. On the first,

two middle-aged women in whitish coats sat rigid, innocent. Leaves flamed for the instant above their heads : they instinctively put up their hands to their hollowed faces until the car had gone.

'That was too much, I'm afraid,' said one to the other. 'Yes, that's all. It has certainly flown away.'

'Wait, it has stopped before. To listen. They say they listen.'

'Listen—a nightingale listen? How curious. Is it known what they expect to hear?'

'I have no idea, Naomi.'

'Disappointing for them to listen, perhaps,' said Naomi. 'But why not? Why should a nightingale get off scot free, after everything it is able to do to us?'

'Poor bird. It's our fault; it's ourselves we hear.'

'Why—Mary?'

'Naomi?'

'Nothing. Only you spoke in such a curious voice.—Has there been anything you have never told me?'

'No, why? Is there anything you've never told me?'

'Nothing—I'm glad to say.'

'Yes,' said Mary doubtfully. 'Apparently we have nothing to regret—unless we begin to regret that we have nothing. Is that what you mean by what nightingales do to us?'

The nightingale, sounding nearer, trickled note by note up into song again : now the fountain was balancing—jug jug jug jug jug. 'It's getting cold,' said Naomi, leaning forward, rewrapping her pale coat across her knees. 'How about turning home?'

'Yes, how about going in?'

As they got up, Naomi observed in her firmest voice : 'Apart from anything, it's too soon. Much too soon, after a war like this. Even Victory's nearly been too much. There ought not to have been a nightingale in the same week. The important thing is that people should go carefully. They'd much better not feel at all till they feel normal. The first thing must be, to get everything organized.'

'How I agree,' said Mary, looking back at the lake. 'But can people live without something they cannot have?'

Not all the lighted windows were now empty : figures of listeners darkened them. Possibly they could not all hear ; some had been merely drawn to the windows by the sensation of something going on. At intervals, late-night traffic in and out of London changing gear at the traffic lights drowned everything. A counter-movement of people who did not know anything about the nightingale, making their way home northwards round the park from the pubs and cinemas, with linked arms, whistling and laughing, occurred in gushes. These annoyed those who had come out, to listen, on to the balconies of the ornate houses farther up the park, most of which were still shut up.

## FIVE POEMS

Behind us, and in all these thousand cells  
 (dark houses blazing to a field of wheat)  
 food, colour, character (and on them falls  
 the same embracing lonely orange light)  
 —the day's intentions and its fragments—meet :  
 and life becomes a centred intimate thing.  
 How can you prove them pitiful but right,  
 balcony, balcony, barring the world's wrong ?

Enemy water out of strangers' wells  
 floods to the heart on tiny dagger feet :  
 a thousand pointless hearts : grief in the halls  
 where slow to-morrows build their stalagmite.  
 Around them image and emotion beat,  
 and the rock winces from the swell and sting :  
 is the flood safe or only out of sight,  
 balcony, balcony, bridging the world's wrong ?

For love is not what the dark chime foretells ;  
 and there is no assurance in our sweet  
 self-behind-armour as of animals ;  
 no festival in all this flowering height.  
 Lift up your barrier ; let us sit and eat  
 (*Love bade me welcome . . .*) ; give us grace to sing.  
 Balcony, balcony, bearing the world's wrong,  
 the city bears no music : but it might.

## FEAR

Now it is time for building houses : when  
 the beast shall speak to his landscape and be beckoned,  
 and all trees shout and leap at us, and men  
 be towers running : night around us reckoned  
 by belting winds, faces and bodies breaking  
 dangerous ways into each other : fear  
 in the streaming field, rage in the air,  
 and the anger of the wicked bell awaking.

Time to use doors : when trusted objects crouch  
 always behind us ; horror in the bed  
 or smiling at windows ; eyes as deft as fencers.

Time to tie cities down and trap the watch :  
 for now that evil rides upon his blood,  
 the beast speaks, and the alien landscape answers.

## SUBSTITUTES

SQUEEZING the private sadness until words  
pearl round it, and all images become  
the private sadness and the life ; and a name  
blood. Or flowering like a bride towards  
the object, amorous of image, a home :  
giving oneself to symbols ; feeding myths.

There is one house beyond opposing paths.  
Pelican or vampire is the same.

Only by going in and not around ;  
pulsing with stone's cold veins ; duck's world, rock's world ;  
sifting the air as trees ; long as the wind ;  
sucking the earth as wheat ; become a field.

No myth will ever come to any good :  
but biting the wasps' apple ; being blood.

## FLYING TO TRIPOLI, 1943

PAGES of sand ; the slow black tape of road ;  
hills with salt and wreckage in their laps ;  
the canvas Mediterranean our guide  
to windy Tripoli and the listing ships.  
It is a kind of death, this vanishing  
—the country or the flier ? Blue flight : then  
after oblivious landmarks, fall with dipped wing  
like angels and with power, among men.

Down by the harbour over drooping wires,  
on amazed marble bathers in the bowl,  
the gloating of the sun is drops or flowers :  
the oleanders and the fountains fall.  
And what is real enough to touch ?—we who  
have died so fast along the death and fire,  
following where we cannot possibly go,  
dazed by the violence of that mine of air ?

Oh flowery white and military town,  
gapped like a boxer's mouth and pink with trees ;  
twirled by the ugly finger of the gun,  
a restless bowl : or with dog's humble eyes  
upon the quiet coarseness of a rein  
strong enough to be gentle. Where the lulled

## NO NEWS FROM HOME

ships nestle deeper ; masonry scuttles down  
from gash or scaffold ; houses have been killed.

Flags that shrug and huddle in the wind,  
summer of war, colour of tree and sky,  
break us your angry bread ; and for this land  
that swarms with supplication not to die  
—hunger of withering spaces where the crops  
are dragged like salvage sunwards ; of men and hills  
with death with salt with wreckage in their laps ;  
and of this town of hesitating walls :

the injury and shyness of a guilt,  
four eyes askance, held steady like a house  
by dug-out, buttress, rifle, barbed-wire-belt,  
where all turns downward, sweet and ruinous :  
beauty that paints and wavers ; fall of men ;  
dropping of strangers from enormous heights ;  
soft imprisoned terror in the sun.  
Death and living have torn down their gates.

And agony ended here : dream into dream  
by water-clock and flower-clock ; rest with  
the grey quay curving like a lover's arm  
and as unsure. Pattern of peace and wrath.  
For the guns tell the time : the earth falls  
roaring and flowering from us ; we are huge :  
the tiny quilt of camps and farms and hills ;  
the road of urgent news, the turning page.

## No News from Home

By CECIL KEELING

THE Villa Giuliano is a tall, square house with rain-swept, peeling walls that stands deep among the olive trees, approached by a long gravel drive that turns in from the Foggia road. All day long the jeeps and three-tonners swarm past in clouds of white dust, and away behind the house one can hear their muted, incessant rumble, the noise of horns and gear-changing, and sometimes a faint, hilarious singing, as the truck-loads of Italian labourers pass on their way to the Army camps.

Behind the villa, as in most country houses in this part of Italy, stands a stone well with a half-hoop of iron over it and a bucket

suspended on a length of wire ; a concrete water tank for the irrigation of the vineyards that is filled from the well by a motor pump ; a block of stables and two or three dark little sheds containing broken wine barrels and a huddle of rusting agricultural implements. At the end of the olive grove, framed in its silver-grey leaves, stands a trim little domed rotunda, mottled with green moss, surrounded by dark cypresses, like a fragment torn from a travel brochure.

There are two families leading an untidy life on the ground floor of the villa. Every time one passes the house there is a forlorn woman sitting on a cane chair outside the door, knitting or shelling peas. Her daughter is sixteen years old, dark and nervous, who spends her time washing the soiled clothes the British troops bring her. There are always piles of shirts and socks and khaki drill slacks lying upon the tables and chairs of their bare, barrel-vaulted living room that is decorated with pious prints. Occasionally she will come to the door, swinging a flat-iron to kindle the glowing charcoal it contains. There are several unkempt children, and dark, secretive men, who look up as one enters, as though surprised in some conspiracy.

Here it was, one evening when we had gone out in search of wine, that we had met Pietro. It was nearly dark, and we could not see whether it was a soldier or a civilian approaching us across the yard. When he came up to us, we saw that he was wearing the grey denim fatigue dress of the Italian army, with two steel stars upon the collar, and one of the high-crowned Alpino hats, with the brim turned down all the way round. He was sturdy, with a round face and searching, humorous black eyes. He came up to us a little hesitantly, anxious to make conversation, it seemed, but uncertain whether we should understand his Italian.

'Are you living here?' I asked him. He pointed across the yard to the stables.

'Yes—myself and seven others, over there. Come over and see.' As we walked across to the stables, he said : 'We've been here about three months—we're artillery!' He grinned. 'There's nothing much for us to do here—we pass our time as best we can.' He spoke slowly and deliberately, as one does when talking to very old, very deaf people. I could not remember having seen any soldiers when I had passed the house before.

'This is our home.'

The stable was gaunt and bare. A dim, unshaded electric bulb hung from the ceiling. Ranged against the walls were eight iron beds, Italian army pattern, and a confusion of clothing, water bottles and knapsacks hung from pegs. There was a rough table in the middle of the paved floor, and seven Italian soldiers were sitting around. They glanced up quickly as we came into the light from the doorway, and then rose, half embarrassedly, smoothing their hands

on their trousers, and gathering round us, they all shook our hands with a rough, exuberant friendliness. Their grey-green uniforms had been repaired unskilfully. The knees of their baggy breeches were dark with grease, and they wore puttees loosely wound above seamed and down-trodden boots. They insisted, almost ceremoniously, that we should join them at the table, and hurried to produce stools for us. They were about to begin their evening meal—upon the table stood a small can of salmon, a plate of cauliflower, a loaf of brown bread. For us they produced a tall aluminium case of coarse, red wine, and poured it out into oval aluminium mugs.

‘Salute!’ we said.

They wanted to know where we came from, leaning forward and fixing their eyes upon us, their unexpected guests. What did we think of Italy? Of Sicily? Didn’t we prefer Italy to Sicily? The Sicilians were a quarrelsome, superstitious lot—they all carried knives and never hesitated to use them.

‘No, no!’ I said, ‘The Sicilians are charming.’ They smiled incredulously.

‘Jealous! Hot-blooded!’ they insisted. ‘Here in Italy everything is so different.’

I produced my cigarette case, and they each in turn accepted one with elaborate casualness, though I knew that tobacco was a gift from the gods to them.

Pietro was standing up at the end of the table in the rôle of impresario of this gathering. His bright eyes were roving over us, and he would constantly peep into our mugs, and pour more wine into them every time we took a gulp. He had to raise his voice to be heard over the rising pitch of the conversation.

‘So this is how we live, you see!’ he exclaimed gaily. ‘Nothing to eat, nothing to smoke, nothing to do! We’ve got Mussolini to thank for this! The war was his idea, not ours. There are plenty of other things to do in life besides fighting.’

He came round to me and bent down, putting his face close to mine.

‘Mussolini has ruined Italy,’ he said, underlining each word, as though it were a sentence set in the large, round type of the reading primers. ‘We had little to complain about before the war. It was the worst mistake Mussolini made. We had nothing to gain by the war—we weren’t fighting for Italy—we were fighting for the Germans!’

The man on my right laid a hand upon my knee, a brown, broad workman’s hand.

‘When the Germans were here,’ he said, ‘there was not much for us to eat—just biscuits, a little meat, a bit of salad. We used to see the Germans in their camp, having a meal. When the meal was over, they used to throw away what they didn’t want. And if we asked for any of it, they’d never give it us—never! They’d rather throw it

away than give it to us. The same with the civilians. I've seen women come up with their children to ask for a bit of bread. But they never got any.'

'Didn't you go about with the Germans?' I asked.

'Not often. They kept to themselves, and we kept to ourselves. Of course, they were paid much more than we were. They'd be in all the cafés, buying up all the things in the shops, and we stood outside, watching them. You can't do much on five lire a day! The Germans wouldn't even give us a cigarette. It wasn't often they gave us a "Buona sera!" This is how they used to walk about the street—'

He rose abruptly from the table, noisily pushing back his stool, and stomped across the room stiffly, his nose in the air, lips pursed. The others applauded and looked across at us for approval.

Pietro stilled the clamour.

'When we were in Bari,' he said, 'two of our sailors had a row with a German. The German tried to pull out his revolver. They hit him—poum, poum! and then threw him into the sea! There were always quarrels with the Germans.'

It was getting late.

'We will have to be getting back to the camp,' I said. As I rose the others rose, and seemed to be almost standing to attention. And then we all shook hands ceremoniously, and they did not resume their seats till we had gone out of the door. 'We'll see each other again soon,' I said.

'Ciao!'

'And thanks for the wine.'

'That's nothing!'

Pietro seemed to have disappeared. We found him in the shadows in the yard. There was something almost furtive in his manner. He took me by the arm and led me by the house, glancing from side to side with elaborate caution.

'If you want some wine,' he whispered mysteriously, 'I can get some for you. But one must be careful. I can get you *good* wine, better than the stuff you've been drinking. Officers' wine!' He leaned forward confidentially.

'I am the *attendente*—the officers' servant. If you'd like to come and bring some empty bottles'—he glanced at one of the upper windows, as though he were planning to lob a bomb through the casements of the Royal Palace—'I can fill them for you. You know, perhaps, if it would be at all possible—if you were willing, we might exchange some wine for a few cigarettes—or a bit of soap—just two or three cigarettes'—his voice became a little despairing—'before the Armistice we had plenty of cigarettes, but now, five a day if we're lucky, but they're terrible for the throat. "Militi," they're called. Have you



tried them?' I had. I popped a packet of ten cigarettes into his hand. 'Put those in your pocket,' I said. Pietro seemed almost alarmed. 'No, no, no!' He clutched hold of my arm. 'It's too much! Just one or two . . . !'

'You're crazy,' I said. 'We've got plenty. We'll see you tomorrow, and then the wine . . .'

'I'll bring you the wine. But perhaps—perhaps it would be better not to say anything to the others—you know how it is . . .'

'I know. Well, Arrivederci!'

'Arrivederci e grazie!'

We heard his footsteps retreating across the gravel of the yard, and made our way along the avenue of trees that leads out to the fields.

John was walking beside me in silence.

'What a delicious rogue. All that business about the wine—as though he were plotting to overthrow the Government!'

'I thought he was going to suggest an immoral excursion.'

'The lady of the house, rudely torn from her bed beneath the lithograph of the Madonna.'

Every evening or so we would call on the artillerymen in their stable. As John and I entered they would rise formally, and set places for us at the table, and a small yellow dog would come from beneath one of the beds, sniffing and wagging around our feet. Their evening meal—the usual can of salmon, the hunks of bread, perhaps a dish of dandelion leaves in oil—would be on the table, and it was a gesture on their part to ask us to join them at it, and a gesture on our part always to refuse. It was the scantiest of meals, and the only one, I believe, that they had during the day, save for a slice of bread in the morning. They drank little wine, but as soon as we were seated the tall aluminium can would be set upon the table, and our mugs filled. They always complained that we drank too slowly—we complained that they never drank enough. I dislike one-sided drinking sessions.

Our conversations usually began in the same way. What news had we heard? Was it true that Turkey and Spain had jointly declared war against the Allies? Had Japanese troops landed in North Africa? The rumours, distilled from the street gossip of Foggia and brought back by the farm folk who went into town each day in their pony traps and farm carts, were passed eagerly from lip to lip in the farmsteads and the houses along the railway, gathering colour and substance as they sped on their way, a fragment being snatched by Pietro or one of the others and brought back to the stable to be speculated on and wrangled over, until John and I arrived. For we represented, to them, the World Outside the Gates, the world of headlines and news flashes, of special announcements and reports from 'usually well-informed circles,' the vibrant, hurried ebb and flow

of tidings that streamed past, leaving this dim backwater untouched and uninformed. Over the wine, surrounded by their eager, shadowed faces, I would try to explain to them what Koorkill had said, and Ross'velt and Stalin and Badoglio. They would listen patiently to my uneven, incorrect Italian, far too well-mannered to guffaw at the gross grammatical crimes I must have continually committed.

But I always sensed that they were never overmuch interested in what I had to tell them—the news meant little to them now, it could hardly ever apply to them. The news headlines left them alone. From the hard, uncompromising life of the farmyard, hedged in by the throng of Fascist minor officials, they had come into the war amid the waving of flags, the speeches from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia, the propaganda posters and calendars that bore the figures of bronzed and Herculean heroes tossing grenades, the songs, the blaring loudspeakers. There had been brief triumphs. They had known Albania, Greece, Eritrea, Libya. And then, not even dramatically, they had lost the war. Their families were mostly in North Italy, in German-held territory. They received no news from them. They talked of their lot with an amused, somewhat detached resignation. At times it seemed to me that they almost expected me to jibe at their worn uniforms, their broken boots, their scanty food. Their thoughts always hung suspended in the past—they brought forth their memories as though they were opening a snapshot album, each page offering its lavish, nostalgic store. For us, at this time, jaded and dispirited as we often were after four years of the barrack rooms of England and hill and desert places overseas, it was possible to contemplate the future without apprehension, but almost with a certain heady optimism. The end of the war, distant and vague and improbable as it sometimes seemed, was the deep, deep couch at the end of an exhausting march. The future would bear, one felt sure, at least some family resemblance to the pre-war past.

With Pietro and Luigi and Carlo and the others who sat with us the future was a tempestuous political whirlwind from which must emerge the unsteady, wraith-like shape of some new Capo di Governo, a sort of benevolent, humanized, de-militarized Mussolini, a 'strong' man, but a wise and a sympathetic man, an unshakable tower against the chill, rude blasts of reaction, who would be able to gather up the wreckage of Italy in slim, capable hands, remodelling and polishing the conglomeration, assembling it all into neat piles of loaves at three lire apiece, Macedonian cigarettes, glossy signorine in red, Cuban heels, long, glittering sports cars, bright posters advertising vermouth and sweetmeats and perfumed brilliantine that could actually be bought in the shops. All of them, except the youngest of the group, had known six years of service in Albania, Greece,

Eritrea and North Africa. They talked of Libya, of the battle that swayed restlessly to and fro like a tide, amid the withered clumps of camel thorn, the wrecked and blackened tanks, the heaps of rusting food tins and tangled wire. Underfed, underpaid, poorly dressed, they were the zanies of the war, the remorselessly caricatured, the ice-cream eaters, the Wolves of Tuscany, Mussolini's fence of gleaming bayonets, trailing despondently in the wake of their sardonic allies, forlorn and bewildered, in their baggy, sweat-stained khaki drill, adorned with the medals and ribbons of the Eritrean and Albanian campaigns. They told us how, when every fibre of their being cried out for the rest and shade of the tents, for a bottle of wine and a cigarette and interminable, nostalgic conversation, the Germans would be around them, dour, busy, energetic, embroiling them all in their wearisome field exercises, their gun drill, their ceaseless, religious drill, drill, drill . . . I sometimes imagined the Italian officers, the neat, prim professors of classical literature, the connoisseurs of wine and painting, the musicians, nervously conferring in their tents. 'We must try and encourage the Men . . . it would never do for the Germans to feel that the Men are lacking in enthusiasm . . . we must think up some exercise or something . . . the Men musn't get *slack* . . .' And then they would sigh, weary, weary of it all, weary of the flat, quivering, tawny skyline and the heat and the probing, indefatigable German staff officers.

One evening they produced snapshots for us to look at, photographs taken in the old days, the brave days, before the sun had begun to set upon their fortunes. There were young men with black, starting eyes in felt hats and patterned scarves; young men with bronzed and gleaming torsos, clambering over a gun or squatting on the wing of a plane that bore the insignia of the Regia Aeronautica; young men in Alpino hats and Dino Grandi beards with sweat glistening on their faces, photographed from a low angle like those on the front page of *L'Illustrazione*, self-consciously posed against a sky that a dark yellow filter over the lens had rendered almost black. A photograph taken while on leave in Italy, in vivid civilian clothes, between two dark and saucy young women, with a palm and a glaring white balustrade in the background. Head and shoulder portraits of a host of relatives, that one had to shuffle through as though it were a pack of cards.

And then had come Alamein, with its terrifying barrage, the shadows of Spitfires speeding across the hot sand, the prolonged, drum-beat detonations and the dust rising in a line by the roadside; the Germans in their fleeing lorries beating at the hands of those Italians who tried to scramble up onto the tailboard. And finally, the serpentine, slow moving trail of prisoners, blinking in the sun, winding past the newsreel cameramen.

• Carlo reached across his bed and tugged my sleeve. Carlo is the baby of the party, twenty years old, and has never been out of Italy—a fact that is a never-failing source of amusement to his colleagues. He was grinning broadly, and his speech was peculiar. He was, I suspected, a little drunk.

‘English—Foggia—Boum ! boum ! boum ! *Mc—scapare !*’ He laughed unroariously. Carlo spoke incessantly in this Jinglesque manner. He was certain that if he relapsed into more complicated grammatical forms I would be at a loss to understand him.

At the end of the table Caporale Fransesi arose, a tin of jam in his hand, splendid in derision. Caporale Fransesi is a type that exists in every barrack room. Confident, cocksure, loud-voiced, something of a wag, his pop-eyes gleaming slyly behind thick, horn-rimmed spectacles. He pointed with his knife at Carlo, who sank his chin upon his arms and squirmed in delighted embarrassment.

‘He’—he paused to gather eyes—‘he, the Baby, our dearest friend, has never been out of Foggia—never ! We—Albania, Greece, Ethiopia, Africa ! When they bombarded Foggia, he was down by the railway, digging a trench for himself. When the bombs started dropping, there he was, shovelling like mad !—’ Caporale Fransesi favoured us with a vigorous pantomime—‘and then he had to dive in before the trench was finished !’

There was a hoot of laughter from the assembly.

‘I was frightened,’ said the Baby, apologetically.

I had seen the railway yards at Foggia. Amid the lines of railway trucks that were like crumpled boot boxes, masses of shattered masonry reared in disordered heaps, twisted girders stabbing the sky like the broken bones of a dinosaur. Far on the other side of the road the metal sides and chassis of trucks lay where they had been flung by the hellish force of the explosions, rusting in the long grass. I thought of Carlo, toiling at the trench that would be only large enough to accommodate himself, pausing to glance up at the vapour trails high above him in the blue sky, hurling himself into the little refuge he had contrived against the terror that raged and cascaded about him.

Luigi, the Tuscan, large, slant-eyed, lazy, was lying on his bed, his rakish Alpino hat tilted over his eyes. He was holding a copy of the *Gazetta di Mezzogiorno* he had found somewhere, thumbing through the newspaper, pausing now and again to read a paragraph, spelling his way through the lines with contracted brows.

‘Have you heard that Ciano’s dead ?’ he asked me, laying the paper aside. We had heard the news earlier in the day.

Pierino, who looks like one of the carousing figures in a Vermeer painting, was perched on the table, engrossed in making a cigarette from some butts he had with him in a small tin box. He looked across at me, grinning slyly.

'The Germans shot him,' he said.

'Ciano—lots of money! Lots of food!' came from Carlo in the corner. Luigi was grinning a little sheepishly, searching my face for an answering, approving smile, as though he felt almost guilty of deriving mirth from tidings of death. I could find no comment appropriate for the occasion, and shrugged. Pierino, on the table, was wagging his head slowly to and fro and clicking his tongue. The great, the grandiloquent, the expensively arrayed, the much photographed, rising to their starry altitudes, then falling, ridiculously, into the cold earth, like a sack of potatoes. Ciano, bumped off by the gang from the other suburb across the way.

I was thinking of the newsreels I had seen in the days before the war—Ciano standing in the bows of an Italian troopship as it steamed slowly into Massawa harbour; a pompous little figure in a tight uniform and his cap over one eye, his arm swept up in the Fascist salute, lips pouting, eyebrows contemptuously raised—a Little Hero with a prominent behind. Then I remembered the pile of shiny-papered magazines I had looked through in a café in Catania—the pages of resplendent Fascist glitter, uniforms in pillared marble saloons, uniforms in open limousines, uniforms at the Stadium, the foyer of the Opera House, at the race track. On the pavements, drenched with sunlight, a throng of glossy brilliantined heads, white, regular teeth, white-rimmed sun spectacles, crowding before the cameras, sentries in steel helmets presenting arms on either side of a Renaissance doorway. Ciano, in evening clothes, like a beaming head waiter, standing upon a black and white tiled floor beneath crystal candelabra, welcoming the potentates, the ministers, the wives of ministers.

Pierino had finished manipulating his cigarette butts. He stood up, as though about to make an important announcement. He was looking inordinately pleased about something, and a little *gauche* at the same time.

'To-day, an American came here, with a camera—he could speak very good Italian. He came here, and while he was here, he photographed us—took a photograph of us all . . . It was very nice . . .' He was almost simpering.

From somewhere among the rafters a buzzer squawked loudly. Pietro started up, and hurried round to me.

'With your permission,' he whispered, pointing upwards, 'the officers . . .' He fled out of the stable.

Mario Bosco was the Great Lover. He came in through the door and greeted us airily. He was wearing an oatmeal-coloured linen suit, a white shirt and a gaily patterned tie. His small, rather fragile face was strengthened by a square-cut beard. The others glanced at me significantly as he came in, and watched him as he crossed to his

béd and slowly divested himself of the linen suit, folding it carefully, hanging the double-breasted jacket upon a coat-hanger and putting the trousers under the mattress. Then he exchanged his white shirt for a grey army one that was torn at the shoulder, and climbed into his worn breeches. He came moodily over to the table to inspect what remained of the evening meal.

I discovered that he went out every evening, thus splendidly attired, in search of whatever adventure the neighbouring houses might offer him. I never was able to find out how successful he was. I imagined that his conquests—had he achieved any—must have been an exhausting uphill climb. There were few Italian girls who would contemplate wasting their time on a serving Italian soldier and his munificent pay of five lire a day, when more glittering escorts were to be found among the British and Americans, with their seemingly inexhaustible supply of money, cigarettes and tinned food. Certainly I never saw Mario return with the air of one who had triumphed.

At this time the neighbourhood had been set a-twitter with the goings-on at the pumping-house. This was a small brick building standing back from the main road, enclosing a deep well from which water was pumped to irrigate the fields. A narrow track led down past it from the road to the railway. Almost every afternoon one could see a little convoy of four or five horse-drawn carriages, each shaded by a jaunty, fringed white awning, proceeding slowly along the road, and turning down along the track, to halt outside the pumping-house.

From one of the carriages a decorative young woman in sun-glasses would descend and flounce into the cool shade of the building, closely followed by an American soldier. The occupants of the other carriages lolled beneath the awnings, smoking cigarettes, occasionally beating at the flies. The horses contentedly munched the short, dry grass, and the coachmen sat up on their boxes reading newspapers. It was a peaceful scene, with something of the aspect of one of the groups in Frith's 'Derby Day' about it. Presently the couple would emerge from the pumping-house, and another take their place. Towards the end of the afternoon the cavalcade would wheel round and wend its way up the track on to the main road and disappear in the direction of Foggia. Faint laughter would drift back upon the breeze. If one looked into the pumping-house one could see, floating upon the dark green water like lilies in an ornamental pool, a large number of 'preservativi.'

From the door of their stable our friends could watch this afternoon performance—they were enormously engrossed in it, particularly Mario, and never failed to comment upon it whenever I came round in the evening.

'How much do you think they're paid?' Pierino asked me, with interest.

Luigi grunted. 'They probably do it for a tin of corned beef.'

'There is a girl in Foggia who earns five thousand lire a day, they say,' said Mario reflectively. They were pretending to be disapproving, but at the same time they were fastening their eyes upon me, eager to hear what I might have to tell them. But I had nothing to say.

Pierino cracked his little joke.

'The Americans,' he said, 'have declared war on the women of Italy.'

'On five lire a day,' said Mario gloomily, 'one has to make love to oneself.'

'There is a shortage of everything to-day,' I said. 'Even love has to be bought on the Black Market.'

Luigi had dragged the little yellow dog from beneath his bed, and holding it by the fore paws, was making it dance a fandango between his legs to the tune of 'Lili Marlene.'

'O, Trombegliere, sta sera non sonar,

Una volt'ancora la voglio salutar . . .'

he bawled.

At that moment the Sotto Tenente bounced exuberantly into the stable. The others looked up and grinned.

'Buona sera, Tenente,' they chorused.

I had seen the Tenente once or twice before, clambering out of the small, green closed car that more often than not stood in a corner of the yard having its untrustworthy entrails explored by someone in oil-stained overalls. He was about twenty-eight years old, small and trim in an elegantly cut sky-blue uniform and black top-boots. He had drooping Bourbon eyelids, a small black moustache and superb teeth. He shook hands with John and me and perched himself on a stool at the table.

'Ow are you keeping?' he said brightly. He was taking English lessons from a British officer at a nearby camp.

He was never still. His knee jiggled nervously up and down, his eyes darted constantly about the table, about the room, his small pointed fingers drumming nervously on the table. Upon his wrist was a very expensive, very complicated watch. He wanted me to write down a few English phrases that he could learn, and flicked out a slim, gold pencil. The others crowded round me to watch.

'Will you please give me a lift to Foggia?' I wrote in capitals.

The Tenente was craning over my arm. I felt his knee vibrating against the table.

'Weel-yow-pliz-geeveh——'

‘And here is the equivalent pronunciation,’ I explained, and wrote :

‘Ouìl iu plis ghiv mi a lift tu Foggia?’

‘Weel you plis geeve me ah leeft to Foggia’ read the Tenente carefully. ‘Okkay?’

He dissolved into peals of laughter, rocking to and fro.

‘Here is another.’ The Tenente watched attentively as I wrote.

‘This is the Major’s house.’

‘Zees-eez-ze-Mejjor’s ’ouse.’

‘Zees—’ began Luigi, and gave it up.

‘Not zees—this. Put the tongue between the teeth and breathe.’

‘Zzzzzees!—Madonna! It’s too difficult!’

Around the table the others were whispering: ‘Zees. Zees. Dees! . . .’

But the Tenente was already getting a little bored with the lesson, and was glancing absently round the table. John had with him a copy of *Country Life*. He darted out a hand and snatched at it, and sat back, pecking rapidly through the pages, his knee never still. ‘Yes-yes-yes! Very good—very nice!’

There was a page of photographs of a great country house. An avenue of elms, casting their long shadows across the smooth park-land, framing Georgian pilasters and pediments, an ornamental pool with Tritons blowing upon conches; the Indian summer-house; the music room—Chinese Chippendale, an Adam ceiling, crystal candelabra.

‘And this is one of the houses of the nobility? *Bella!* The ’ouse of the milord! Okkay? Correct?’

His laughter, reaching an almost hysterical pitch, rang through the room.

On the next page was a grotto, its walls and ceiling lined with sea shells and scraps of glass in the blithe taste of the late eighteenth century.

‘And this, surely, is Byzantine?’

Humming softly, his gaze was wandering across the table to the scrap of paper on which I had written the English sentences. He whipped it across to me.

‘Write for me,’ he commanded, ‘in English, “Will you dine with me to-night?”’

I did so.

‘Allova, *will* you dine with me to-night? Will you have an egg?’

He had risen, and was standing, all expectancy, by the door. I smiled politely, and then realized that this was not an English exercise. He was inviting us to dinner with him. It was going to be difficult to refuse, and harder still to make it abundantly clear that we were not welcoming this opportunity of leaving the stable for an atmosphere slightly more luxurious. John and I rose slowly, a little loth to leave.



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The others were already looking down at their boots.

'We'll be back later,' I said hurriedly.

The three of us went out into the yard, and crossed to the villa. There was a bare stone staircase leading upstairs that echoed hollowly as one climbed it, its walls distempered duck-egg green, like the rear entrances of hospitals.

The Tenente skipped on ahead. On the landing we ran into Carlo, who stepped back and stood at attention. At the top of the stairs were a pair of folding doors, and with a sweeping gesture the Tenente beckoned us inside.

Within was a broad, high-ceilinged room, the floor paved with tiles. In one corner stood a kitchen table, piled high with a confusion of household articles—a mattress and a heap of bedding, a towel-horse, several wine flasks, a china jug standing in a basin, a roll of rush matting. Against the wall stood the frame of a brass bedstead. At the far end of the room was a wardrobe of yellow-varnished wood, its door ajar, displaying a pile of bed sheets, a pyjama jacket, a collection of picture frames. There were several pictures on the walls—shiny lithographs, each one edged with a pattern stamped in relief to imitate gilt framing. There was a picture of a child in flouncy clothing offering an apple to a dog; shipwrecked mariners on a raft poised upon the crest of a wave that seemed to be made of green treacle; a Madonna dandling a glossy and pneumatic Holy Child; a saint, his pale greenish flesh pierced through and through with arrows. A radiogram throbbed and vibrated, filling the room with musical comedy tunes.

At the head of a long table in the middle of the room sat il Maggiore. He was stout, jowled, with heavy eyelids that drooped over prominent eyes; his jacket, which fitted him too tightly, was decorated with two rows of medal ribbons. Tucked beneath his chin was a table napkin that spread across his broad chest. He looked like the tyrannical Commandant in a French film of the Foreign Legion. He was throwing back a glass of wine as we came in, and his eyes bulged at us over the rim of the glass. He slapped the glass upon the table, blew out his cheeks and scrubbed his lips with a corner of the napkin, bobbing his head at us, and following us with his eyes as we came round the table. The Tenente was darting about the room, collecting chairs.

There were two other diners at the table. One, slouched across the tablecloth that was flecked with coffee stains, was a stout, elderly peasant in a cloth cap, his cheeks covered with grey stubble. The other was a spare, wiry, sharp-featured man, about thirty-five years old. He rose to shake hands with us, and I saw that he was wearing riding breeches and black top boots. Behind the Maggiore was a door leading into a little kitchen, and within I saw Pietro and

Mario. Pietro, looking a little worried, was frying eggs over a small stove.

We sat down at the table, I next to the Tenente, John by the side of the man in riding breeches. Pietro tiptoed into the room, removed the glasses that stood before the two strangers and disappeared into the kitchen. Presently he reappeared with the glasses washed, and set them before John and me. The Tenente filled them for us, and poured a little of the wine into an aluminium mug for himself. Pietro came back with an egg for the Maggiore—a small fried egg, bleakly isolated in the centre of a large plate. A heavy silence seemed to have fallen upon the assembly since our arrival. I sought for something to say. I leaned across to the Maggiore.

‘Do you speak English?’ I asked, weakly.

The Maggiore paused, his fork half-way to his mouth.

‘Non,’ he said abruptly, ‘je ne comprends pas.’ He heaved his thick shoulders up in a shrug, and began chasing a piece of egg round his plate with a scrap of bread. The man in the cloth cap was scrutinizing me closely, taking up pieces of bread that littered the tablecloth and nibbling at them. Soon he nudged me with his elbow.

‘We have two kinds of bread here,’ he said heavily. ‘This—we buy, and this’—he grabbed a slice of bread and put it by my plate—‘we make ourselves. Try it. Which do you like best?’

I tasted the bread; there seemed to be little difference in the flavour of either. ‘I like this,’ I said.

The stout man laughed noisily. ‘You see!’ he said to the Maggiore, ‘he prefers this!’ For some reason, it seemed to amuse them.

Pietro had reappeared and set before me a fried egg. He seemed to be tremendously on his dignity, hovering deferentially behind the chairs, his eyes darting over the party. I winked at him when he went round the table to John, but he carefully avoided my eye. Tonight he was very much the officers’ mess orderly, but not entirely, I felt, at his ease. The Maggiore, who had wiped his plate clean with a piece of bread, was holding it out for Pietro to take away, without looking up. Then he filled his glass and swallowed the wine in one draught.

Across the table, John was concentrating his attention upon the man in riding breeches, picking his way through an unwieldy conversation. John spoke no Italian, his neighbour barely more than a dozen words of English, but John was producing an elaborate patois he had evolved, and with which, he was wont to tell me a little defiantly, he found himself able to hold an animated conversation with almost anyone for any length of time, augmenting the discussion with what he called ‘dumb crambo’ and little sketches drawn on the backs of envelopes. The man in riding breeches was entering into the spirit of the thing.

A few evenings later on our way into Foggia we met Pietro. He was wearing his Alpino hat and a new jacket. He seemed a little downcast.

'Come to-night and have a last glass with us,' he said. His unit was moving to Bari the following day—a move that, I believe, they had been anticipating for some time, and without any enthusiasm. The tranquil existence at the Villa Giuliano would be at an end, and at Bari the unfamiliar shadow of 'disciplina' and the Military Police would hang heavily over their heads. They had no idea as yet what they would do at their new abode, but they spoke gloomily of boots and buttons that would have to be polished (with little chance of obtaining the necessary polish), of guards and morning parades.

That evening John and I went over to the Villa. There were only Pietro, Pierino and Carlo in the stable, the three of them looking a little woebegone and sitting on their beds. Most of their scanty furniture had been moved out, leaving only their own beds and the small cupboard where they kept their stock of wine and the tins of salmon. The table and the rickety stools had gone. Outside in the yard stood a pile of crates and boxes, and a heavy British Army lorry.

Pierino greeted us with a rather wry smile.

'When are you going?' I asked.

'To-morrow. The rest have already gone. There's only the Major remaining here.'

He crossed to the cupboard and took down the case of wine, filling two mugs for us.

'Our last day at the Villa,' he said. 'To-morrow—Bari!'

'How are you going? By train?'

'No, by lorry. Some English lorries are coming to take us down—ourselves and the stores. Two of the English drivers are here now. They're sleeping here.'

He indicated two plank beds in the corner, over which mosquito nets were draped.

At that moment two British soldiers in dishevelled khaki drill shirts and shorts came into the stable. One of them was carrying a blackened tin can from which steam emerged.

'Ow you doin', chums?' he greeted us. He put the can down upon the stone floor, and produced two enamel mugs. The other rummaged under his bed and pulled out a cardboard box which he hoisted on to the table.

'Three tins of bully, two milk—what's this?—cheese? 'Ere, Alf they only put two bleedin' loaves in—I thought you said it was four?' He slapped the contents of the box upon the table. 'And that's sugar.'

'There's plenty of biscuits, but they can stuff *them*. You won't get me eatin' biscuits when I can get a bit of bread. Chuck us over the milk, and we'll 'ave a drop of the old char.'

'Not that one—that's finito. Give us the full one.' He stabbed the blade of a jack-knife into the milk tin, and began carefully stirring the tea in the blackened can. The tea was thick and dark.

'Care for a drop of the old char?' I held up my mug of wine.

'What's that—vino? Can't think 'ow you can stomach that stuff—a bit too much on the tart side for me!' He looked across at Pierino.

'Vino no bonno—eh, Johnny? Marsala, vermoot—bonno!'

'Buono vino!' said Pierino amiably.

Alf's pal took up his mug. 'Let's 'ave a shoofiti. She's bonna. She's just the bleedin' job.'

Alf said to me: 'You care for a biscuit and a bit of cheese?'

'No, thanks.'

'Because you're welcome, if you want some. You've only just got to ask. We've got plenty. There's half a tin there and a full tin in the box. So you've only just got to ask.'

Alf sucked in a mouthful of tea, and looked round suddenly at Carlo, as though he had seen him for the first time, and flung his arm affectionately round his neck. Carlo giggled.

'Well, me old china, how's me old china?—been up to the casa to see the senoritas? You can't kid me—I seen you round the 'ouses!' Alf turned to me. 'E's a proper one for the senoritas, this one is!—always chasin' round for a bit of the other.'

'What is he saying?' asked Carlo.

Pierino looked across at me. He seemed to be taking a proprietary interest in the two drivers. 'They're good boys, these. Always joking—always laughing!'

'Three days we been on this job,' Alf's pal explained. 'We've been movin' this lot down to Barry. We could ha' done this job in a day, if it wasn't for their bleedin' Major. We come up 'ere and we load up and down we go to Barry, and as soon as we get down there they want us back 'ere, and there's their Major with another load of bloomin' junk to go on. Is that the lot? I says; Yes, that's the lot, 'e says, and off we goes to Barry again. Then they 'phone up again—we've got to come back 'ere for another load up. Look 'ere, I says to their Major, 'ow long are we going to be on this job, are we going to be finished be Friday? Yes, you'll be finished be Friday. You get ready to start be oh-seven hundred hours to-morrow. So we gets ready to start off be oh-seven hundred, but d'you think *they're* ready? No bleedin' likely! He keeps us 'anging around till nigh on ten 'undred hours lookin' round for something else 'e's found, and then when we're out on the road he comes out. Can 'e 'ave a drop o' petrol? So I 'ops out and gives 'im 'is drop o' petrol. Is that all?

I says. Finito? Yes, that's all, 'e says. So I should bleedin' well think, I says. 'The old bleeder!'

'Ow 'ave you been getting on with this lot?' Alf asked dubiously. 'You're not workin' 'ere with 'em? Oh, no—you'd be over with the R.A.s.'

'No,' I said, 'we've been looking in on them now and again and having a drop of wine.'

'They're all right when you get to *know* 'em,' said Alf judiciously. 'We get on all right with the ones they give us to give a 'and on the truck. Work! You should see 'em 'andle them old crates! Of course, it makes a difference if you can speak Iteye. If you can speak Iteye you can get on with 'em.'

'You sure you won't 'ave a bit of this cheese?' asked Alf's pal. 'Because there's plenty there. You're welcome. You've only just got to ask. 'Ow about your mate?'

'Yes,' continued Alf, 'they take a bit o' getting used to at first. There's the good and there's the bad. But mind you'—he lowered his voice confidentially—'I wouldn't trust any of 'em. I *wouldn't*, I tell you straight. I wouldn't trust any bleedin' foreigner, for that matter.'

'Nor me neither,' said Alf's pal complacently. 'Nor me neither.'

'What are they saying?' asked Carlo.

'No.' Alf took up his cup and threw the tea leaves through the doorway. 'No. They can 'ave the poxy country—I don't want it. "Sunny Italy!"—Gawd strike a light, there's been nothing but bleedin' rain for three months! Why people used to come out 'ere before the war Christ Almighty knows. There's nothing 'ere I'd give you a thank-you for—well, is there? You wait till I get back 'ome. I'll be able to tell 'em a thing or two about *Italy*. Travel! I've done all the travellin' I shall ever want to do. Gimme Wood Green for the rest of my time and you won't catch me complainin'.'

'Or Doncaster,' said Alf's pal. 'It won't be too soon for me when I get back to Doncaster. A couple o' pints and my missus waitin' for me. What ho! *Git* up them stairs! There's a drop o' tea left if you fancy a drop.'

Alf said: 'Well, if we've got to be off early in the morning, we'd best be getting down to it.' He tugged at his mosquito net. 'A fat lot of good that'll be to keep the mozzies out. Full of bleedin' holes.'

John said: 'Yes, we'd better be getting along, too. It's getting late.'

'How far is it to your camp?'

'Oh, not very far—just across the way.'

We rose, and Pierino, Carlo and Pietro came out into the yard with us.

‘Attenzione ! There’s a lot of mud there !’

Pierino held out his hand.

‘Arrivederci,’ he said. ‘Perhaps you will be coming down to Bari some time, and we shall meet again.’

‘Arrivederci,’ said Carlo, standing to attention.

‘Arrivederci,’ said Pietro. He kissed me solemnly on both cheeks.

‘Arrivederci !’

We walked down the yard to the avenue that leads across to the camp.

‘I wonder how they’ll get on at Bari,’ said John.

In the stable we could hear Alf, or Alf’s pal, bursting forth into the strains of ‘Nellie Dean.’

## Elegy

By JOHN LEHMANN

Do not expect, bewildered by your tears,  
An easy answer for the heart or mind,  
Nor sudden truth to blaze from the unseen,  
Nor magic respite from the wound that sears ;  
To die, that’s certain, is to go behind  
A wall no eye can pierce, however keen,  
A curtain whose divide no hand shall find.

Millions have trusted what the legends tell :  
*The dead live on, their spirits freed from cares*  
*Beyond our time and skies their praises sing*  
*Throned in pure light or deep in asphodel ;*  
But never witness has returned, who bears  
One trophy blossom from that deathless spring,  
One sublime phrase of those Elysian airs.

*The dead live on :* but not in fields of bliss  
Where the warm cheek we pressed shall lean again  
Welcome to ours beneath the golden bough,  
And every sorrow vanish in that kiss,  
And not with angels, but in the living vein  
Of all who sow behind their spirit’s plough  
And reap in cycles the maturing grain ;

And though the tears we shed will bring no smile  
To lips once set in cold nobility,  
It is love’s wisdom so to weep, for grief



## THE WOMAN WHO WAS LOVED

Can turn the hour of loss from cloudy ill  
 To that clear element where memory  
 Throbs like a sun that quickens earth to leaf,—  
 Their simple, mortal immortality.

Only the stabbing moment starts the cry :  
 'O loved one, whose last words vibrate like bells  
 Heard over water, you need have no fears,  
 All shall be done as if you were still by,  
 All change eschewed' ; but the long grief compels  
 No dedication that may waste our years  
 Knowing no ghost in watchful sadness dwells.

No ghost shall murmur comfort ; therefore, though  
 If the raw wound should fester it would seem  
 Past bearing that one journey never will  
 Reach harbour where twin hopes had planned to go,  
 Love's elder faith may cleanse it and redeem  
 What is no more, from nothing, so it still  
 Transforms the substance of each act and dream.

O miracles of grief we dare to know :  
 Down the long vista where the seagulls cry  
 Is it the promise of the fires of May  
 Over the green-starred branch-tips pulses so,  
 The April sun that laps caressingly,  
 Or the still purely blessing spirit's ray  
 Of one who loved too perfectly to die ?

## The Woman Who Was Loved

By JAMES STERN

THE day after Miss Higgins had gone, nothing remained of her but her tennis racket. Ned and Miriam had found it in the attic—a soiled, slightly warped thing with a rubber grip, on which the now departed governess had inked her name in large square letters :  
 ETHEL B. HIGGINS.

'It's a pity she got engaged to Dr. Stimson,' Mrs. Turnbull said to her husband when the car had carried the woman away. 'She was a good sort. It'll be hard to find a better.'

'I don't like governesses who marry,' grunted Mr. Turnbull.

'She gave the children a wonderful time,' his wife continued. 'There's no doubt about that. I do hope they won't be too unhappy. Miriam's such—such a sensitive child. *Underneath.*'

‘Children!’ mocked the father. ‘They don’t care!’

‘You never can tell,’ Mrs. Turnbull said knowingly. ‘They were awfully fond of her. I wonder what the new one will be like. I wish I’d been able to see her. It’s such a risk taking them on recommendation, and at such short notice. Women like Miss Higgins,’ she sighed, ‘don’t grow on every tree!’

Bored with the subject, Mr. Turnbull relapsed into silence. The name of Miss Higgins, indeed, might never have been mentioned again had it not been for the tennis racket, which Ned and Miriam brought immediately to their parents. Mr. and Mrs. Turnbull were in the dining-room, sitting over their breakfast, when the children burst in.

‘Higgy’s left her racket behind!’ they both shouted at once.

‘Shish, children!’ admonished their mother, a finger to her lips. ‘Daddy’s trying to read the paper!’

Mr. Turnbull peered over the top of the *Morning Post*. ‘Time the new governess came,’ he growled. ‘Never heard such an infernal din.’

‘Oh,’ asked Ned and Miriam simultaneously, ‘When’s she coming?’

‘To-morrow evening,’ Mrs. Turnbull said.

‘What’s her name?’

‘Miss Whitmore.’

‘What’s she like? How old is she?’

‘I don’t know, Miriam.’

‘On spec!’ Ned said.

Mr. Turnbull cleared his throat with irritation.

‘Now leave the racket here,’ said his wife briskly, ‘and run up and clean your teeth. I can see you haven’t touched them yet.’

‘And then what shall we do?’ asked Ned for the fifth time since Miss Higgins’ departure.

Mr. Turnbull laid down the *Morning Post*. ‘God dammit,’ he shouted, with all the authority he could command, ‘did you hear what your mother said?’

The children looked away. Then, very slowly, shuffling their feet, they slunk from the room.

The periods between governesses—the family averaged two a year—were not easy days for Mrs. Turnbull, for then she had to take charge of her children, a task for which she knew herself to be unfit and which embarrassed both her and them. It had been the mother’s habit to see her children regularly three times a day: first, at breakfast, when Ned and Miriam came to say Good-morning; then, at eleven o’clock, during Lessons, when she called on them in the school-room—a duty always the most painful for her to perform, for in the presence of the current governess she found herself invariably dumb.

Each morning as she walked down the long corridor to the large bare schoolroom (which Mr. Turnbull had had specially built 'to keep out the din'), she would ask herself: 'Now what shall I say to-day? I must think of something new!' Yet, when the moment came, when, closing her eyes with embarrassment, she knocked, and shyly, carefully turned the handle of the schoolroom door, her imagination refused to function and for four long years the mornings of Ned, Miriam, and all their governesses had been interrupted with the same unanswerable greeting: 'Well, how are we getting along to-day?'

The third visit, for which there were two alternatives, took place between the hours of six and eight. Should the parents themselves have visitors, then Ned was dressed in a tunic of white or blue, Miriam in muslin of the same colour, and the two 'came down' to say How d'you do and eventually Goodnight. But in the ordinary course of events, Mrs. Turnbull would 'come up' for this purpose, entering what was still known as the Day Nursery with that diffidence people reveal when in a strange house they open doors in search of a toilet. Once inside, she would bid Good-evening to the governess, and then, no matter what the hour, turn to her children and say: 'Now hurry up, both of you, it's long past your bedtime!'

While they prepared themselves for sleep, she would gaze out of the window, stare at the view, move a stray toy from one place to another, remark upon Ned's untidiness, the prospects of the weather, the length of the children's hair, and occasionally whisper into their ears a question as to whether they had 'gone somewhere properly this morning, dear.' Finally, when Ned and Miriam were in their pyjamas and could think of no means of postponing any longer the last moments of their day, she would move into the Night Nursery, where, with a peremptory 'Now then,' she would lower herself into the one armchair, lean forward, cross her hands in her lap, and close her eyes. From the habit of years the children recognized this performance as the signal for each in turn to kneel at their mother's feet, place their elbows on her knees, lock their fingers, and proceed to mumble two quite unintelligible prayers, followed by a smothered recitation of the hymn: *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild* . . .

This always embarrassing duty accomplished, the mother would rise and follow them to the narrow twin beds, and there lean over and lay her face for a moment on their foreheads, pat their curls, bid Good-night to the governess in the Day Nursery, and leave the room as a burglar might escape from the scene of a carefully planned crime.

In one respect only was Mrs. Turnbull's position less painful when a governess was not present: there was the absence of that ever-critical eye keeping watch in silence on her helplessness. It was never long, however, before realization of this fact served only as a reminder of her failings: her lack of contact with, and control over,

the children infamous Nature had allowed her to bring into the world. Though unconscious of the fact that she behaved toward her own offspring as she would have toward another's, she did realize that they, aware of her indifference, offered her no respect; and that she, in consequence, gained no authority. Harsh words had little effect, while her last resort, the threat of their father's name, produced only silence—a stubborn, unconquerable resentment, commonly known as 'the sulks.' When they disappeared between meals, she did not know where they were. She went out into the garden and in a high-pitched, bird-like voice, cried between her hands: 'Cooo-eeee! Cooo-eeee!' During the ensuing silence she would stamp her foot, then call out their names: 'Ned, where are you? Mirry—aaam!' As often as not they were within earshot, sitting in the branches of their favourite tree, the enormous lime behind the tennis court, giggling into fists stuffed between their jaws.

In the evenings, when she came to 'see the children in their bath' (a duty she now performed only on Saturday nights), they would scream, at first with laughter and then with anger, crying out to her that no nurse or governess had ever washed them 'that way.' It was here in the bathroom, when she was alone with and close to her children in their nakedness, that the full realization of the gulf between herself and them made itself manifest as at no other place or time. She would stand over them and, to the accompaniment of the hissing sound made by grooms when curry-combing a horse, scrub their backs and legs and arms and necks in such a way that the soap splashed over their faces and seeped into their eyes. And when they howlingly resisted, guarding themselves against her treatment by covering their smarting eyes with their hands, she would suddenly feel afraid, as though the two screaming children in the tub were not of her own flesh and blood, but some strange reptiles intent on doing her harm.

'Out you get!' she'd cry. 'A little soap won't kill you! Get out and dry yourselves, before I go and fetch Daddy!' To which threat they reacted as they always did, by sulking silently. Beyond this, her behaviour had no consequences, bore no fruit; and the prospect of the next governess, of Miss Higgins' successor, of the return to normal—without which children, like adults, can rarely live content—was welcomed as much by Ned and Miriam as by the man and woman whose incomes alone made the procession of governesses possible.

Yet not one of them was prepared for the shock created by Miss Whitmore. No one bearing the remotest resemblance to the new arrival had ever been seen inside the Turnbull home. At sight of the drawn yellow face, the veined and sickle-shaped cushions under the mournful eyes; the poor, lifeless, mouse-coloured hair raked up from the lean neck and rolled into a wad under the tiny hat of black

straw—at sight of her the children, after a moment's incredulous stare, turned in their tracks and bolted. Not until they had reached the Nursery and slammed the door did they give vent to their astonishment and laughter. 'The old hag!' choked Ned, throwing himself, convulsed, into the one armchair.

Although mirth was the last sensation Miss Whitmore's arrival created in the parents, it was nevertheless Mr. Turnbull who, when the butler had left the room during dinner that night, uttered the remark which he continued to repeat long after the woman who caused it had turned her back for ever on its author. 'I'm afraid, my dear,' he half-whispered to his wife, 'that Miss Whitmore is not a product of your agency's top drawer!'

But the outward appearance of the new governess, as the children were the first to discover, was far from the woman's only peculiarity. The first shock came when she spoke. From the lined and bony throat, encircled by a string of black beads, her voice came booming out, its tone as deep and powerful as that of a man. What Miss Whitmore said, however, punctually at ten o'clock on the first morning, was no less unexpected.

'Put away all those books!' she thundered, and the command echoed round the schoolroom walls.

The children stared. They stood, opposite one another at the table, paralysed, dumb. Put away their books—those thumbled and tattered primers from which all their lessons had been learned! They glanced up at the woman, then, furtively, back at each other, with wide, bewildered eyes.

At the head of the table the thin frail figure in black, the worn yellow hands clasped over her meagre stomach, stood motionless. The children could not move.

'Dummies!' boomed Miss Whitmore. 'Those books, I said! Away with them! Out with evil memories!'

Slowly, with the half-hearted motions of those faced with the incomprehensible, the children began stacking their worn volumes one on top of the other.

'Listen!' came the bark again, 'I'll have you run up and down that terrace if you can't move quicker than that!'

But it was Miss Whitmore who moved first—moved so fast, in fact, so surprisingly, that the children stepped back bewildered, to watch, with consternation quickly giving way to awe, the long bony hand shoot out and grab the books from the table. Fascinated, they stared at the woman as she then pitched each book, with apparent recklessness but astonishing aim, into the empty fireplace.

'That,' cried Miss Whitmore, when she had cleared the table, 'is why you're dummies! You're bored, that's the trouble with you! No one should ever be bored!'

. Still the children revealed no visible sign that they had heard or understood. Perplexed by what they had just been witness to, they stood gaping into the fireplace, at their thumbed and ink-stained books and papers—the living proof of all the facts and figures laboured over in that room—when suddenly Miss Whitmore's hand came down on the table with such violence that they were shaken, finally, to attention.

'Dummies !' she boomed again. 'You're still asleep ! Out you go on to the terrace ! Out of this room ! Out into God's air !' And turning from them, she steered herself stiffly, arms rigid, toward the French window. Gripping the brass handle, she opened the door.

'Now then !' she commanded, as though she were addressing a couple of puppies. 'Out you go !'

The children followed her at a careful distance. Then, drawing near, they sidled round her in the doorway, stepped out on to the stone porch. At the sound of their sandals on the stone, Miss Whitmore lowered her eyes.

'Shoes !' she cried, clutching Ned by the arm. 'Shoes ! Off with the beastly things ! Away with one of man's silliest inventions !'

Still slow to comprehend the unexpected, Ned and Miriam stared first at their feet, then quickly at each other, finally up at her. At last, with the infinite precaution of those who fear to be made fools of, they began unclasping the straps of their sandals.

'Hurry, young man !' Miss Whitmore said, her hand still on his arm. 'What's that they call you ? Ned ?' Suddenly she let out a chuckle of mirth. 'Ridiculous !' she cried, her voice breaking, high. 'That's what they call the donkey ! Your name's Edward—perfectly good name. Now then, both of you, run !' And clapping her hands, she made a mock rush at them.

Stepping gingerly out on to the gravel, they took to their bare heels and, like bolting colts, tore along the terrace as though to prove to her that however inactive their brains might be, their limbs at least were in a very different condition.

Behind them, unseen, alone, the woman stood still, while there passed over her faded face an almost imperceptible transformation : the pale lips slowly parted ; the mournful eyes receded behind their surrounding web of lines, and a filmy substance rose and made them shine. Miss Whitmore was smiling. . . . But instantly the mask—the creases, the eyes, the lips—fell back into place, and she raised her hands to shield her mouth. 'About—*turn* !' she thundered.

Halting near the end of the terrace, the children swung round, lifting their feet high at the sudden pain. As they drew up before her, flushed and panting, her eyes went over them, from head to toe. 'Keep away from shoes,' she said, 'and you may grow up at least with decent feet . . . ! Now, come in.'

They followed her into the schoolroom. 'Put those beastly things away!' she commanded.

Ned picked up the sandals and placed them on top of the piano.

'Now then,' Miss Whitmore said, as she walked toward the table, 'next thing you've got to do is to forget everything you ever learned!'

But before the children had had time to reach their seats, there came a faint knock upon the door and Mrs. Turnbull stepped silently into the room.

'Well,' her tongue said, 'how are we getting along to-day?' But instead of advancing further, as was her custom, she stood still on the threshold, staring mystified at her children as they prepared to take their chairs at the table.

'What on earth,' she asked at last, 'have you done with your sandals?'

They paused in the act of sitting down, then glanced, not for sympathy, but defensively, at their mother, at their feet, and finally—with the look of those who share a secret—at each other.

But Miss Whitmore had already risen from her chair. With one hand on its back, and the other fingering the black beads at her neck, she turned to Mrs. Turnbull.

'Children,' she said, as though quoting some well-worn maxim, 'children should refrain from wearing shoes until bare feet cause them embarrassment.'

Miss Whitmore sat down.

Ned and Miriam's eyes met, exchanging what no one but they knew were smiles. Mrs. Turnbull, her face a study of astonishment, continued to stare. Then, as though someone had prodded her from behind, she turned and escaped rapidly from the silent room.

At lunch that day she said to her husband: 'What do you think I found the children doing in the schoolroom this morning?'

Mr. Turnbull hunched his shoulders, shook his head.

'Walking about the room in bare feet!' cried his wife. 'Ned's sandals were on the piano—on the *piano*!'

'Peculiar,' grunted Mr. Turnbull.

Such was not the reaction his wife had desired. 'If only that were all,' she added quickly. 'What d'you think that—that Whitmore woman said? Children, she said, without so much as giving me a name, oughtn't to wear shoes until they want to! Did you ever hear such cheek?'

'She sounds about as awful as she looks,' observed her husband; and he added: 'I never saw an Englishwoman look like that before!'

His wife breathed a sigh of satisfaction. She said: 'I was thinking of the poor children.' Then, pausing to let the subterfuge sink in, she murmured: 'Poor darlings, they looked so unhappy. If only Miss Higgins hadn't—hadn't fallen in love!'

' 'Well, one thing's certain,' said Mr. Turnbull, with rare heartiness. 'no one's going to fall in love with *her* !'

Because children are more adaptable than adults, because their memories are short and they are not burdened with responsibility or convention, Miss Whitmore at the end of a week was little more strange to Ned and Miriam than had been any of her predecessors at a similar period in their reigns. They accepted her violence, her code of values, as they would have a new home, or as, after a period of time short enough to shock the thoughtless, they would have accepted the death or disappearance of their father or their mother. The young are no less compassionate than their elders. Innocent, and therefore incapable of understanding the subtleties of hypocrisy, they live in the present, grieving only for the loss of those whom they sincerely love—a love, as often as not, bestowed upon a rabbit or a doll.

As the days passed it seemed quite natural, in fact, even perfectly sensible (as indeed it was), that this faded woman with the booming voice should fill their schoolroom hours with denunciations directed at everything that, by endless repetition and poring over primers, had previously been dinned into their heads. In language they could understand, she would inveigh not only against all accepted means of enlightenment, against text-books, dictionaries, the practice of committing information to heart ; but against false indulgence of the commoner human instincts : against the mania of acquisition, the hoarding of money, against the collecting of moths, butterflies and birds' eggs ; against the hunting and shooting to death of wild animals ; against the evil of ridicule ('Look into your own heart,' she once boomed at them till they blushed, 'before you laugh at another's face !')—and, above all, she would pound into them warnings against the danger of having been born an Englishman.

This last, they soon discovered, was Miss Whitmore's favourite subject. It was through it, in fact, that gradually her diatribes began to decrease and the mornings of invective to turn into monologues that led, at last, to horizons more familiar to the children, and thence to regions which, while geographically near, were in reality as remote from them as were the lives of those who spent their days there. The first sign that Miss Whitmore was about to alter the tenor of her verbal curriculum revealed itself one morning after she had been expounding her theories on what is known, among adults, as the Myth of Racial Superiority, but which Miss Whitmore described as 'all this nonsense about people in one country being better than those in another.' She had just maintained, much to the children's surprise, that there was no such thing as an Englishman, when she suddenly broke off, rose from her chair, went upstairs and returned with a book—an



object so rarely used by her in the schoolroom that Ned could not conceal his desire to learn its title.

'Well, Edward,' said Miss Whitmore, 'I'm glad to see you don't believe curiosity is going to kill you any more than it did the proverbial puss! Curiosity is an excellent thing. So is this book. But that's not the reason I have it here. I brought it down because—just as I don't think you should go to church simply because others do—I don't want you to believe a word I say simply because I say it. I don't suppose I've uttered an original thought in my life. What's more, I doubt very much if you will, either. Well, anyway, the author of this book and I are great friends. We agree on most things. The fact that he died over two hundred years ago makes no difference. He was a man who said and believed what I've just told you: that there's no such thing as an Englishman—and don't you ever forget it. You happen to have been born of an old and wealthy family. Well, the sooner you forget that the better. This is what my friend had to say on that subject.'

Raising her head and closing her eyes, Miss Whitmore was silent for a moment as though summoning her memory to obey her will. Then, in a low, steady voice, she solemnly recited:

*Great families of yesterday we show,*

*And lords whose parents were the Lord knows who.*

Miss Whitmore opened her eyes. 'My goodness!' she suddenly cried, 'write that down. . . .' While the children began hunting for pencils and paper, she again closed her eyes.

*Your Roman—Saxon—Danish—Norman English,* she quoted,

*From this amphibious ill-born mob began*

*That vain, ill-natured thing, an Englishman.*

'You can write that down, too,' Miss Whitmore said. And while the children wrote, she slowly repeated the lines.

'Well now,' she said, as they finished, 'shall I tell you who my friend is? No, I won't. I'll tell you the title of one of his books.' And raising the volume in her hands, she stood it upright on the table for them to see.

Both children exclaimed at once: 'Robinson Crusoe!' 'So?' said Miss Whitmore, 'then Mr. Defoe is a friend of yours, too?'

'Oh, yes!' cried Miriam.

'Oh, yes!' Ned repeated. 'Higg—er—Miss Higgins gave us *Robinson Crusoe* as a holiday task!'

'Task!' boomed Miss Whitmore, with a passionate energy that still inspired them with awe. 'What good a holiday if it has a task in it? What good, for that matter, to read about Man Friday keeping himself alive on a desert island, if you can't boil an egg to keep yourselves alive in a luxurious modern home?'

To which remark Ned, despite himself, let loose an irrepressible

snort of laughter. Whereupon Miss Whitmore, demanding to know what was 'funny about that,' cuffed him over the head with the palm of her hand, then dragged him off, convulsed between laughter and astonishment, to the kitchen.

'All right, then,' she said, planting him in front of the stove and asking the flabbergasted cook for a saucepan and an egg, 'all right, Edward, boil this!'

'I—I can't, Miss Whitmore,' stammered Ned, his face solemn at last, his head lowered, and his feet scraping nervously at the unfamiliar floor.

'Can't, eh!' snorted Miss Whitmore; and while Ned watched, she proceeded to boil the water, then cook three eggs, which she and the children ate, later, for their lunch.

While Ned and Miriam were engrossed in a heated argument over Time and the Consistency of Yokes (which Ned won because, as he said, 'God dammit, I saw it happen, see!') the elder Turnbells were seated over another meal at the far end of the house. 'What d'you think,' asked Mrs. Turnbull of her husband, 'what d'you think Mrs. West told me just now?'

Grunting, Mr. Turnbull hunched his shoulders.

'That—that Whitmore burst into the kitchen, demanded a saucepan, and boiled some eggs!'

'Boiled some eggs!' repeated her husband, swallowing half a potato. 'The woman's mad!'

'What's more, she said that poor little Ned had been dragged in there to watch. He was almost in tears, she said.'

'Children,' pronounced her husband pompously, 'have no business in the kitchen.'

'That's just what Mrs. West said. In the middle of their lessons, too.'

'I won't have a raving lunatic in the house,' said Mr. Turnbull with finality. 'Not for another day. That woman should be certified.'

'And do you know what she told Mrs. West?' His wife lowered her voice as though she were about to confide to him a long-kept secret. 'That one day the children will have to use their hands as well as their heads! She said that the days of governesses are numbered!'

'So far as she and we are concerned,' cried Mr. Turnbull, smacking his thigh with one hand and wiping his mouth with the other, 'Miss Whitmore never spoke a truer word! It is for you, my dear, to see to that—at once!'

That evening, for the first time in several Saturdays, Mrs. Turnbull mounted the stairs ostensibly to 'see the children in their bath.' She found them, to her surprise, alone—playing peacefully in the tub with a fleet of celluloid warships.

'Well,' she said brightly, seating herself on a stool, 'all alone?' Her question was greeted with enquiring stares.

'Miss Whitmore!' said Mrs. Turnbull in a tone of slight irritation. 'Doesn't she come and see you in your bath?'

'Oh, no!' answered Ned and Miriam, as though the very suggestion were too novel to contemplate.

'But—well, hasn't she—ever?'

'Oh, no!' they repeated.

Mrs. Turnbull rose to her feet. 'Now, look here, children,' she began in a tone that made Ned and Miriam exchange an apprehensive glance. 'I want your—your honest opinion. You're—' she hesitated, out of her depth—'you're old enough now to tell me—what you think. Er—I'd like to know—do you—er—like Miss Whitmore?'

For several seconds the bath-tub water was still; there was not an audible breath in the bathroom, not a sound throughout the house. Then Ned, with his head down and a splashing flourish of his arm, grabbed a warship and sent it spinning toward his sister. Miriam caught it and sent it spinning back.

'Ned! Miriam!' exclaimed their mother with an impatient stamp of her foot. 'I'm asking you a question. Did you hear me? Stop playing with that—that toy!'

Miriam promptly held the warship under water, while Ned, covering a blind and wrinkled face with his hand, muttered: 'She's all right.'

Miriam slowly picked up a flannel and, without raising her head, started lathering it with soap. 'Yes,' she murmured, 'she's all right.'

'Well,' said their mother, making small attempt to conceal her satisfaction, 'it's pretty clear what *that* amount of enthusiasm means!' And with this, she pecked her children on the cheek and bid them good-night.

The following morning, when Ned and Miriam came down to the schoolroom punctually at ten o'clock, Miss Whitmore was not at the table. 'Beat the old girl this time,' Ned said, and they settled down to wait. They pulled out some paper and started playing Noughts-and-Crosses. Then Miriam accused Ned of cheating and the game ended in a squabble.

Ned leaned back and yawned. 'Maybe she's sick,' he said at last. 'I'm going up to look.' 'Me, too,' Miriam said, and she followed her brother out of the room, up the stairs, past the Nursery, to the door of the Governess's Room. Outside, they stood still, their heads on one side, listening. They glanced at each other and stifled a desire to laugh. Then Ned raised a fist and knocked carefully on the door. When there was no answer, he knocked again, louder. Then, quickly, as though half-expecting to be greeted by a corpse, he

turned the handle and flung open the door. Before them, through closed windows, the sun blazed in on a spotless, uninhabited room.

They turned to one another on the threshold, their mouths open, their eyes wide. 'Gone!' breathed Ned. Miriam said nothing.

Closing the door quietly behind them, they tip-toed away from it as though they had left someone sleeping there. Together, in silence, they passed along the corridor, down the stairs. They walked on silently through the schoolroom and out on to the terrace and from the terrace, never turning, they moved on soundlessly over the lawn of the tennis court, coming to a halt only when they had reached their favourite tree, the enormous lime. There, without a word, they climbed into its immense branches and sat down, hidden from one another by thick canopies of sweet-smelling leaves.

'Cooo—eeee!'

The high-pitched, bird-like voice struck strangely across the country silence.

'Cooo—eeee!'

But still the children did not speak. Unknown to one another, tears were falling down their faces and their fists were stuffed between their jaws.

## Three Poems

By PETER YATES

### THE RACK

WRITE on the rack, O worshipper!

In carnal heat

Distil love's echo like a bird;

And in joy's vice, disdaining Word,

The empty vase refill.

For still they come, those whisperings

Whose syllables

Ignite once more the tallow flesh;

And in thought's hurt, withdrawing flush,

Make Always seem to-night.

Is not the crisis joy enough?

Could miracle

Astound the senses thus, and be?

Why should mind search, relentlessly,

For hungers more profound?

## THREE POEMS

Eve's bitten apple in a dream  
 Became desire,  
 Denied the abstract singleness  
 Of void : the divine happiness  
 By faith electrified.

Writhe on the rack, O worshipper !  
 Though sceptical  
 Wreath bitterness ; hear body ask  
 And give : love's superhuman task  
 Shall make the cold God breathe.

## A MEETING

ONE afternoon, walking upon the lost  
 Blitz-sinister and crawling globe,  
 I dreamed the marriage of impossibles :  
 The ending of unending like a kiss.

It was a damp and melancholy park,  
 Where Autumn-burnished skeletons  
 Dripped with the Spring's perennial ;  
 And there, freed by my blood's anxiety  
 A Presence of imagination born  
 Disturbed the ether like a wind,  
 And spoke these words : this bleak command :

*Delineate the features of that Guide  
 In wanderlust of cerebration known.*

And suddenly, with every faculty  
 I felt the radiation of those words,  
 And knew the blasphemy of all escape.  
 The ending of unending like a kiss  
 Glowed on my lips, and in a flash I saw  
 The discipline and labour of my task :  
 Inexorable, but winged with victory.

## DEATH AND THE IMAGES

UNWRAPPINGS, cerements . . . the will to be—  
 Where is the quickened tense  
 Unwound ? Outrage the tomb . . . like those profound  
 Recurrent nightmares where the End  
 Astounds, death tortures with simplicity.

But odour of old thought : complexity  
Remains . . . death's images  
Defend, exalt . . . blind being to its end  
In pure transparency too light  
For friend, or friction of thought's elegy.

Inhale the images . . . from congealed breath  
Of darkness like a flash  
Religions glare : forked lightnings that ensnare  
Eternity in human time's  
Despair, and give the Word its density.

Impure, unkillable . . . the glitterings  
Blaze on the grave hole's fringe  
And cry : awake ! translate ! we fructify  
The wilderness . . . we are the *shapes*  
You die, your arrogance in Omega !

The End, imagined as abyss or home,  
Exalts the messages ;  
And far . . . beyond the images that mar,  
Mortality illuminates  
A star, the hint of Zero quickening.

## Two Poems

By ODYSSEUS ELYTIS\*

*Translated from the Greek by Nanos Valaoritis.*

### THE AGE OF BLUE MEMORY

OLIVE-TREES and vines spreading to the sea,  
And, beyond, red fishing-boats as far as memory,  
The golden sheaths of August over our midday sleep  
Full of sea-weed and shells. And this a green vessel  
Newly built spelling in the waters' peaceful embrace:  
*Our Lord will provide.*

\* Odysseus Elytis is one of the most prominent of the younger generation of Greek poets. He was born in Crete in 1912. He went to school in Athens, and studied law at the University there. In 1940 he fought in the Albanian campaign with the rank of lieutenant. He has published two collections of verse—*Orientations*, 1939, and *Sun the First*, 1943.

## TWO POEMS

Like leaves, like pebbles the years went by,  
I remember the young sailors leaving  
With sails the colour of their hearts  
They sang of the four horizons  
They carried North winds tattooed on their chests.

What was I looking for when you came in the colour of dawn?  
The age of the sea in your eyes  
The health of the sun in your body  
—What was I looking for  
Deep in the sea-caves in those spacious dreams  
Where the wind flung his feelings like foam,  
A blue stranger carving his sea-emblem on my chest.

With sand on my fingers I clasped my fingers  
With sand on my eyes I clasped my fingers  
It was the sadness  
I remember it was in April when I first felt your human heaviness  
Your human body of clay and sin  
As on our first day on earth  
The amaryllis were being celebrated—I remember  
You suffered from a deep bite on the lips  
A deep nail-mark on the skin  
Where Time is being eternally traced.

I left you then

The wind thundered and swept the white houses  
And scattered the clean white feelings over the sky  
The light shining from a smile.

Now I shall have by my side a jug of immortal water  
A form of the wind's shattering freedom  
And these your hands where love suffers  
And this your shell where echoes the Aegean.

## HELEN

The first drop of rain killed the summer  
Drenching the words that had created starlight  
All those words whose only purpose remains—You.  
Where shall we stretch our hands now time is no longer concerned  
with us?  
Where shall we turn our eyes now the distant lines are shattered or  
clouds?  
Now your eyelashes have closed on our landscapes

And we remain—as though the fog had gone right through us—  
Alone, all alone, surrounded by your dead images.

Our forehead leaning on the window-pane  
Sleepless we watch the new Sorrow  
It is not death will strike us since You exist  
Since there exists elsewhere a wind to enjoy you fully  
To adorn you closely as our hope adorns you from afar  
Since there exists elsewhere  
A verdant plain beyond your laughter spreading as far as the sun  
Informing him secretly that we shall meet again,  
No, it is not death will oppose us  
Just a tiny drop of autumnal rain—  
A blurred feeling  
The smell of wet earth within our souls  
Continually receding from each other.

Although your hand no longer rests in our hand  
Although your blood no longer flows in the veins of your dreams  
It is the light on the immaculate sky  
The invisible music within us Oh! Sad  
Traveler, of all things that bind us still to this world  
It is the damp wind, the autumn season, the hour of separation  
The bitter leaning of the elbow on a memory  
That appears, when night parts us from light.  
Behind the square window that gives on sorrow  
But shows nothing  
For it has already become a music unseen, a flame in the fireplace  
Chimes of the huge clock on the wall  
For it is already  
A poem, a verse followed by another verse  
A sound running parallel to the rain  
Tears and words, but also whose only purpose remains  
Unlike other words, in You.

## The Man Who Killed

By JIRI WEISS

‘THE difference between this war and the last,’ said the doctor, sipping hot tea and staring into the flames, ‘is that this one is going on in spasms, whereas the other had a certain continuity. You know, if there are months and months of horror, you get used to it and it doesn’t register any more; whereas now—well, everything is



crammed into a few hours, days or weeks. Before you get used to it, it's over—and there you sit again, nothing happens and you get demoralized and bored—until, bang, another whirlwind shakes you with some other, quite different kind of horror. You open your eyes and see whether you have won or lost, or you try to push your blanket off in the morning and it seems pretty heavy because three floors of your house have fallen on top of it during the night, or you try to get out into the street and you can't because they have invaded the town between last night and this morning. Yes, this is a different kind of war. There are millions of soldiers who have never been in battle and yet they have been wearing battledress for years on end ; others have been defeated without ever firing a shot—yes, without having ever seen an enemy. Ask the boys who have been to France or Belgium in 1940. Still, the killing is always the same—the difference is only in human reactions ; morale they call it. And there are certain imponderables which cannot be just brushed away.

'Take me, for instance. I was barely eighteen in 1916 when they called me up into the old Austro-Hungarian army. Millions of Czechs were called up with me ; there was no choice ; what a formidable military machine it seemed—and yet two years later it simply fell to pieces. But I couldn't know that then ; anyway, after only six weeks I was sent to the Italian front. Italy, you remember, had been sitting on the fence for a year, and then declared war on Austria and Germany in 1915. Well, if there ever was a Maginot Line in the twentieth century, it was there. The front was on the southern slopes of the Alps, both sides entrenched deep in the rock of the Tyrolean Alps or the limestone of the Dolomites ; during the long months the hill-sides were honeycombed with casemates. Limestone is the ideal rock for fortifications ; easy to drill and difficult to smash by artillery fire. You remember Monte Brioni, overlooking Lago di Garda, that sweet, blue Alpine lake ? There I was ; on the opposite side, in the entrails of the Monte Baldo, were the Italians. Between us was a valley with a corner of the ultramarine water of the Lago and a village or two, scarcely touched by the artillery fire incessantly screaming over the valley. The Italians sent back as good as we gave, and the ding-dong shelling went on and on throughout the war. Every morning at seven they started, so we knew it was time for breakfast ; I remember one day they started forty minutes late and we all overslept ; how we swore at the Italian gunners ! Yes, that was a different war altogether. I had just left school and I still felt like a schoolboy in a very stuffy, noisy academy ; it was spring when I came, at least down there in the valley, and we used to look through our glasses at the olive groves and the peasants tilling their fields and the children playing *pelota* in the evenings on the village green half ruined by shellfire. Six weeks later spring came to the heights, snow-roses, crocuses and all

that. We had to be almost the whole time underground, but our artillery emplacement was violet with blossoming crocuses. During the shelling a bird would twitter on a broken birch just at the entrance of the dugout. We watched it, day by day ; one morning it appeared in the company of its mate and they began to build a nest. The bird laid her eggs and then reared her young when they hatched out. The whole company used to watch their family life in the pauses between bombardments ; it was much more amusing than looking through the telescope into the windows of Torbole down there in the valley, pretending to see naked girls or intimate details of the domestic life of Italian peasants, which until then had been our favourite pastime. The birds didn't worry at all about the screaming shells or the explosions, but quietly went on raising their family. Down in the valley came summer ; the Lago was more blue than ever, like a coloured postcard, and the white rock was hot as a bread oven. Nothing happened but bombardment and reconnaissance ; we looked at the shining, blue water and dreamed of a swim ; here and there men were killed, very impersonally and at long range : Whizz-bang—and there was nothing left but a hole in the rock ; or there was a series of flashes on the side of the Monte Baldo and a man dropped dead ; or there were some tiny dots among the bushes on which you in your turn trained a machine-gun and squeezed the trigger. Some of the dots fell, the others ran for cover ; next morning the landscape would be peaceful as before, with the high-pitched bell on top of the Torbole *campanilla* tinkling through the midday air.

‘So autumn came with grapes ripening in the vineyards and morning mists creeping up the slopes of Monte Baldo. There was a derelict farm some one hour's walk from our positions, well near our lines. We used to slip down there in the pause between the evening and the night bombardment (I told you they used to be punctual), and crush whole bunches of silver-blue grapes in our mouths. One evening, going back from our vineyard, we got into the barrage ; or better, the barrage got on to us—their timing was wrong, we thought. But there it was, and us in between flying rock and shell splinters ; still, I was young and the thing was fun ; I carried my tin hat in my hands, full of fresh grapes, and ducked from rock to rock, from shell-hole to shell-hole. Suddenly there was a roar which seemed very, very near, the earth shook and I fell, carefully lifting my grapes so as not to lose the precious load ; something warm ran down my face and I rubbed the dust out of my eyes and looked for my companion. He was gone. . . . Instead of him, there was a huge hole in the ground and a boot full of bleeding flesh. I dropped my tin hat. The grapes were sprinkled by tiny drops of blood. I ran for it. The shells whistled over my head, but nothing fell near me ; before jumping into our lines I looked for the broken birch with the nest—but it

was gone, too. Hit by one of the first shells, my friends said later. I must have been severely shell-shocked, staring with bewildered eyes all around me, like a child just wakened from an awful dream ; I had always been a hypersensitive child. My commander, Captain Hofmiller, sent me back to Innsbruck.

' Our Divisional H.Q. was in Innsbruck at the time, and the place buzzed with rumours. An offensive was being prepared. Alpine regiments were to be employed on a large scale ; volunteers were called for to train as skiing *chasseurs*. I volunteered after a few weeks of life behind the lines ; it was October, and in the town the roofs were dripping with eternal rain ; one never saw the peaks of the surrounding hills—they formed platoons of volunteers and took us high into the mountains, to huts used in summertime by shepherds. I took to skiing like a duck to water. It wasn't a good time to start ; in October the snow is old and hard and blizzards drench you now and then with icy cold rain and hail, but when you are eighteen such things are just fun. Our sergeant was a middle-aged policeman from the *Allgäu* called Sepp. He loved skiing, which was quite a novelty in those days, and he wasn't at all bad, if you make allowances for the old-fashioned technique of those days. He even let us jump, and roared with laughter when we rolled down the valley ; he taught us how to take cover in the snow, drape the white cloaks over our heads, dig holes with our alpine axes and merge into the landscape—all in six weeks. It was a holiday, full of forgetfulness, and passing as holidays do. Well, before Christmas we were back in Innsbruck, lively as a school treat. After a few days of boredom in barracks we were sent to an unknown destination at the front—a battalion of newly trained Alpine *chasseurs*—the Italians call them *bersaglieri*.

' How bewildered I was when I saw the well-known features of the countryside ; it doesn't often happen that one is sent to the same sector twice in a war. But there we were, as the lorries dropped us, with the huge slopes of the Monte Baldo looming snowclad on the horizon and the white shape of Monte Brioni in front of us. Soon I went past our old lines, the place I knew so well from before—but it looked different in the grey December light. The positions must have taken a severe battering during my absence, and the mixed Czech and Austrian regiment was replaced by sullen Croat troops. Well, we took to our quarters as best we could. The days of happy-go-lucky war were over ; the shelling went on incessantly ; there were rumours about an oncoming Allied offensive. Also rumours about famine at home, in Prague. I was a lad who never thought of politics ; my father being an Austrian civil servant of Czech extraction, I had been kept out of reach of the growing Czech nationalist movement ; at that time I felt just caught in the war machine and determined to get the best out of it—that was all. Christmas came and went ;

New Year. We became prisoners in our dugouts, with nothing but snow and shells and explosions around us, living on tinned food and beetroot. We quarrelled and listened to stale jokes and quarrelled again, ate and slept and quarrelled again. Old Sepp, the sergeant, had a hard time to keep us in order ; our only pastime was restoring the telephone communications, which broke down daily in the bombardment.

‘ Finally news came that the Allies were to start something in the next few days, and we got orders to reconnoitre ; as our sector was likely to be involved in a possible offensive, our commander asked for volunteers to have a look at the Italians. The whole platoon stepped forward, everybody was anxious to get out, and so the captain gave old Sepp freedom to pick his men. He chose me—for I was a good skier, and Pali, the best shot of the battalion. Three men was enough, Sepp thought—the fewer the better. One heedless movement in these quiet nights and a patrol would be betrayed in the emptiness of no-man’s land. Then Very lights and flares would go up, as had happened often before ; and you can’t hide more than a handful of men. I was proud to be chosen from so many, and was as excited as I had been at school before exams. I could hardly wait for the darkness. At last night began to fall.

‘ Sepp sat at the table, chewing a hard crust of bread. He always had an old crust in his pocket, which he would quietly chew in moments of tension. Pali, the Hawk-eye, oiled his rifle for the *n*th time ; he, too, was excited. After all, all of us had seen Monte Baldo every day for months on end and we’d never had a close look yet. But to-night ! Sepp grunted. We’d better check our equipment ; a man’s life may depend on a well-adjusted shoe or ski ; on a well-oiled rifle bolt. So we did. We checked and re-checked, while the minute hand of our watches crept nearer and nearer to zero hour. Just before nine Sepp got up and clicked his heels ; the captain had entered. He took the old fellow to one side and whispered something in his ear. We tried to hear but couldn’t catch it. Sepp nodded, clicked his heels again, saluted. The captain turned to us : “ All right, boys, get going. And good luck. If anything goes wrong Sepp will fire a Very light.” That wouldn’t be much use to us, I thought, if we’re up there under the nose of the Italians, but one isn’t in the army to have thoughts of one’s own. Off we went.

‘ The night was quiet and crisp with cold, the shelling having stopped at nightfall. I can remember how the snow cracked as I adjusted my skis. A couple of stars hung serenely over the mist. I heard the breathing of Sepp as he got up, his skis lashed to boots. “ Ready ? ” he whispered, and then : “ All right. Keep close together.” And off he went. We followed, whisking in and out between rocks. The night seemed so unreal, like a silent film without

music. Rocks passed by, broken trees, the snow was silvery and smooth, except for fresh shell-holes. We didn't speak, but drove down into the valley as if we were on silk. Now and then I looked up to the slopes of Monte Baldo. It was quiet, except for the occasional rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun far away in the mountains, echoing and re-echoing from the slopes. It was far too quiet for my liking, after the continuous bombardment of the last weeks. I saw the white cloak of Pali gliding before me like the shadow of a ghost.

'At last we reached the old, much-shelled road which divided no-man's land into two. It was called, Gods knows why, Strada dei Angeli, the street of the Angels. When we got there I realized at last how deep the snow was all around us ; the wooden crosses, marking the graves of Czech, Austrian, Italian, German and other soldiers sleeping their last sleep side by side, were almost completely covered. That meant that there was at least five feet of new, soft snow ; it would be impossible to move fifty yards without skis. Sepp began to climb the slope of Monte Baldo. Now and then he would stop and peer into the darkness ; he seemed to have cat's eyes and always found the right way. On and on we went ; my heart leaping from time to time right into my throat. I looked at my watch, whose luminous hands gleamed under my glove : Quarter past eleven. So we must be pretty near the Italian positions and their minefields. Or just among them. Anyway, the mines are deep in the snow. . . . Still Sepp went on. The snow creaked thinly, as his ski touched and broke through the ice crust formed by the night frost. I don't know what happened for a while, because I must have dozed off, lulled by the rhythmical beat of his steps. One is likely to if one is very tired or excited ; I have often slept while marching. As I opened my eyes there was silence. All of us stood, peering into the darkness above us. The mist trembled with excitement ; something, I didn't know what, hung in the air like an impending avalanche. I must have stopped quite mechanically, following Sepp's movements, but now I was wide awake. I heard Sepp take a bite of his crust ; he began to munch it, stopping from time to time, listening intently. Suddenly he pulled me down in the snow. "Quiet !" he hissed, as I was about to ask what was going on. I saw the dim shape of Pali, who instinctively pulled his cloak over his face ; I followed suit, peering into the darkness. My nerves were like a resonant harp. I listened—and suddenly I heard *IT*. A low hiss, produced by many pairs of skis cutting through the icy crust on top of the soft snow layer. Yes, there it was. In a few seconds, which seemed endless, I could discern the shapes of many skiers descending around us. I could even see the feathers in their caps. It was the *bersaglieri*. Some dragged little sledges with machine-guns as they slid down into the darkness, a battalion strong, I guessed. Another lot followed. And yet another. My heart

tick-tocked under my white cloak. Now I understood what it was the captain had told old Sepp . . . or at least I thought I did : *The Allied offensive had begun*. We were now in the rear of the enemy. I turned round. Old Sepp sat half sprawling in the snow, quietly chewing his bread. Damn his eternal munching ; what a habit ! He looked up at us quietly and remarked through his teeth : " *Our offensive is supposed to start at four in the morning. . . . Bang, that's the end of it.*" The wind swept over the hillside and a bombardment of tiny snowflakes made us shudder. Sepp took another bite : " *They'll catch our boys off their guard. We never knew that they'd start so soon. We ought to warn them . . . but how?*" He seemed to think hard, his slow mind working on simple problems like a locksmith improvising an aeroplane engine out of soup tins. Suddenly he got up : " *Sorry, boys, we're in for it.*" He put his hand in his pocket and fired his Very pistol once, twice, three times. He fired a whole rainbow of rockets into the quiet night.

'The result was indescribable. The night broke into flames—for later I realized that we must have been sitting right on top of an Italian battery ; machine-guns started chattering, mine-throwers coughed, and within a minute the whole front was aflame ; I don't know what they thought—they may have thought Sepp's Very lights were the signal to begin, they may have thought them an S O S. Maybe it was all a mistake of a subaltern officer, through which a well-planned offensive often breaks down. While we were sitting, under our cover, dazed by the hell let loose by Sepp's seemingly innocent display of fireworks, my mind imagined staff officers swearing, telephones buzzing, everything disorganized, by God, what a mess ! One, two, three flares flamed up high in the air, machine-guns spluttered from our trenches and the guns opened up ; the *bersaglieri* down in the valley replied, rifle shots crackled. Suddenly a Very light, a yellow and a red one, went up straight over our heads, and down in the valley the firing ceased. I understood that the Italian commander didn't want to give away the position and the strength of his force ; without the tactical advantage of surprise they'd be just wiped out ; so he called the show off. Our people didn't know the extent of the enemy attack, otherwise the fire would have continued on a much greater scale ; so it was all over in ten or twelve minutes. And there we were, three men, breathing heavily with excitement, high on a slope among enemy positions. I saw Sepp's eyes gleaming in the night : " *Boys, we're in a hot spot. We have spoiled a nice offensive—they won't take prisoners. We are three—one of us might have a chance ; so we'll split and try to get through as well as possible. Good-bye.*" At such times one's brain works at an incredible speed ; I realized in a second the difficult situation we were in and how right Sepp was. We shook hands. Now Pali : " *Good luck, old boy.*" How noisy

the snow was as I pushed off into the night ; how clumsy my movements seemed to me. . . . That shadow, down there, that was Sepp, disappearing towards a ravine which we knew to be there, while Pali had already gone in the opposite direction. I was left alone on the slope of Monte Baldo. Panic swept through me like a cold storm for a moment, and I felt my feet shaking. But as my skis glided through the smooth snow, obeying every twist of my body on the velvety frozen crust, I gained confidence. I gripped my rifle and speeded up, whistling down the mountainside like an arrow. My speed must have been considerable, though I couldn't control it in the darkness. Suddenly I saw a chain of black figures coming up the slope—and it wasn't until then that I realized that I was certain to run into the homecoming *bersaglieri*. Well, my speed increased my boldness : there wasn't much time to think. I was in for it. Before I knew where I was I had broken through their cordon and whizzed past them. They were so surprised they didn't shoot quick enough. Probably they thought I was one of them, since I came from the direction of their positions—and when I was among them it was too late. A few shots whistled after me and two or three of them wheeled round and made a half-hearted attempt to catch me ; but soon they gave it up—I saw no more of them. My heart sang. My head was in the clouds. I felt like a demi-god riding the wind. My skis rustled the smooth icy snow-crust and the cold air felt like the Halleluiah of a giant organ. Only once or twice in life does one experience such a deep emotion. . . . Suddenly something hard hit my chest and knocked the life out of me.

' I don't know how long I was unconscious, but I do not think it can have been for long. Carefully, as if making an inventory, I lifted limb after limb. I lay in the snow, under a small rock beneath a broken fir-tree. I must have overshot the rock and fallen on to the small tree and broken it. . . . Left knee . . . right knee . . . left ankle, right ankle ; no, everything felt all right. Everything, except the skis. The skis ! Yes, the skis were broken. I tried to slide on the broken remains, but I fell after the first two steps. I took off the splintered skis and tried to walk. Impossible : I sank knee deep, waist deep into the soft snow under the smooth crust—that crust which rustled so elusively a minute before, when I was whistling down on my skis ! Now it broke under my feet, again and again, catching my knee, my shoe, my ankles. A quagmire of snow. Walking was impossible. I lay on my side and looked at my watch : only quarter to one. The luminous numbers seemed to twinkle at me like friendly eyes, as if they wanted to give me courage. I stiffened : it wasn't so bad after all, there was almost a whole night in front of me. Let us wait a minute, I thought. Something may happen. And it did.

' From down below I heard a rustle. Somebody was approaching. A fool, he was a bloody fool. He was humming a song, a silly Italian sentimental tune : "*Sul mare luccica l'astro d'argente*. . . ." Up and up he came. I gripped my rifle. Funny how clear one's senses, how lucidly one's memory works. I saw him. I could see his *bersaglieri* cap, his white cloak, I could even see the shape of the feather in his cap and his pointed nose and his moustache, as he turned his head. But clearest of all I saw his skis. Skis ! That was it. I had to get those skis, or else I was lost. The bolt of my rifle clicked, but he didn't hear it ; I had cocked it, shifting myself to a good position. And on he came, a man returning home, happy to be alive, humming a silly song, not knowing that he is facing death—death at the hands of a little boy of eighteen, holding a piece of steel. I told myself I must have those skis. I tried to squeeze the trigger, but my finger would not obey. It is one thing to fire a gun at squares on a map, to drop bombs on toy-like, blacked-out streets of a town, even to submerge one's ego into the animal rush of an attack at the point of bayonet—but to kill a man who walks up to you, singing, in a night like that in the Alps, is quite another matter. At that moment I thought of the difference between War and Murder. Indeed, whether there is a difference at all. . . . Anyway, it all happened far too quickly. When he was only some twenty paces away I managed to lift myself up. The muzzle of my rifle dropped as I shouted for all I was worth : "Hands up !" He stopped. Then, with a quick movement he whipped out his revolver and fired three rounds at me. He couldn't fire more. For I lifted my rifle slowly—and taking aim carefully—as if at target-practice—I pressed the trigger. It was a clean hit, smack between the eyes.

' He fell like a sack. It was strangely quiet around us. My fingers trembled as I took his skis off. I refrained from looking into his face. I tried those skis, but they didn't fit my boots ; moreover, they were of that old-fashioned kind which have metal fittings, which cannot be adjusted on the spot. After a few minutes' trying I had to give up. The only thing I could do was to take the dead man's boots off, for they fitted the skis. I don't know how I managed it ; but I did it all right. I remember how warm his boots were inside. I vomited and put snow into them to cool them off. Rather foolish in the circumstances, but quite understandable, isn't it ? Anyway, the boots fitted me splendidly, and I got safely away.

' At the Strada dei Angeli I met Sepp, but how I got back to our lines I don't know. Sepp said later that I was delirious, he had to hold his hand over my mouth to stop me from shouting "Murder" and things like that. I was ill with pneumonia for three months afterwards ; they didn't send me back to the front until the spring of 1918. Soon afterwards I deserted to the Italians to join the Czech



army which was being formed in Italy. End of 1918 our country became free—and now, well, we are at war again, with Italy on the other side. . . . Yes, I've seen a lot of fighting in my life, but that episode has always haunted me. For twenty years I've been wondering whether what I did that night was War or Murder. . . .'

## War

By ANDRÉ CHAMSON

*Translated from the French by John Lehmann*

No, it is not these puffs of white  
That burst, above the forest's edge,  
Suddenly on the sky's blue ledge  
And slowly drift and thin from sight ;

No, it is not the blows of shells  
Like giant axes that behead  
The firs, and stretch them out for dead,  
The booming of these great steel bells ;

No, it is not these sounds that tease  
Among the fields of ripening grain,—  
The whistling in the air again,  
The drone like giant swarms of bees ;

It is this face beside my face  
Close in the narrow trench we share,  
The eyes I meet, their haggard stare  
Stretched wide with horror of this place,

It is the solemn fixity  
Emaciating mouth and nose,  
The look, austere, resigned, of those  
Whom death is calling silently ;

It is for me, just round my lips  
In the dank hole I've made my lair,  
The rim of foam, if no one's there  
I wipe off with my finger-tips.

# THE CREATIVE WORD

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## 'Some Notes on King Lear

By EDITH SITWELL

(from work in progress)

For Arthur Waley and Beryl de Zoete.

IN the plays of Shakespeare, the most gigantic hymns to life ever born from the heart of Man,

None does offend, none, I say, none.

So said the old King upon the dark moor. And so said his loving creator. The terrible storms of the tragedies, though they are vast as the upheavals of Nature, are not blind as these. It is no fault of the sun if we wreck our world. In *King Lear*, in *Timon of Athens*, the giant diatribes are only the reverse side of love.

Only that which is too cold for Hell, as was, perhaps, Iago (once a native)—only the hard hearts of Goneril and Regan, these only are condemned.

'To see the true light,' said Meister Eckhart, 'man must become blind and strip God naked of things . . .'

Here, in this play, in which the cry sounds always 'Tom's a'cold !' (Man going bare to Death, or Man under 'the extremitie of the skies')—unrolls before us the history of a great King, who must learn that his hands 'smelle of Mortalitie.'

This being, ancient as the heavens, for whom Age is an element (Coleridge said of King Lear that 'old age is a character,' but it is more than that : it is the essence of Lear's being, the space in which he exists)—through the blindness of the mind reaches the Night of the Soul—though not that which is known to the Saints—and through the Night of the Soul reaches the light. And this history is mirrored by that of the great King's lesser counterpart, his servant Gloucester—the lusts of the heart in Gloucester taking the place of the pride of the mind.\*

Cries the mad Lear to his blinded servant :

O ho, are you there with me ? No eyes in your head  
nor no money in your purse. Your eyes are in a heavy case,  
your purse in a light; yet you see how this world goes.

*Gloucester*: I see it feelingly.

*Lear*: What ! Art mad ? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes.

Act IV. Scene V.

\* What could better point the transcendent issues Shakespeare has developed . . . than this encounter of the sensual man robbed of his eyes, with the wilful man, the light of his mind put out.'—GRANVILLE BARKER.

The old King, the events of the play, have the hugeness of Nature's forces. With 'the waters' of 'old fond eies'

. . . poore old heart, he holpe the heavens to raine.

Act III. Scene VII.

Those tears have the mightiness of the heavens in dissolution, that would 'temper clay'—the cold clay of the earth and of Goneril's and Regan's hearts. The clay of his own nature.

At one moment, the King who had left humanity to its wickedness, as Lot's wife had left Sodom—cast a glance over his shoulder at the abandoned and abandoning—moved by an instance of kindness, a redeeming pity in the heart of man. In answer to the words of the messenger sent by Cordelia :

You shall have any thing,

Lear, the humble, replies :

No Seconds? All my selfe?

Why, this would make a man a man of Salt,

To use his eies for garden water-pots

Ay, and laying autumnne's dust

—a man of tears, laying the dust that the fullness of life, the ripening, has laid upon the heart.

At moments in the play—indeed in almost all the plays—tears seem, not a barren waste overflow, but a sign of living, and a life-giving wonder.

'Be your teares wet?' Lear asks of Cordelia—then adds 'Yes faith: I pray weepe not.'

Yet by those tears, he knows that she yet lives.

Cordelia, earlier, sighs :

All bless'd secrets,  
All you unpublish'd Vertues of the earth  
Spring with my teares.

There is an echo, or rather a foreshadowing, of the tears of the old humbled King, in this miraculous passage spoken by Titus, in the first scene of the third act of *Titus Andronicus* :

*Titus* : O earth ! I will befriend thee more with raine,  
That shall distill from these two ancient urnes  
Than youthfull Aprill shall, with all his showres.  
In sommer's drought Ile drop upon the still ;  
In Winter with warme teares Ile melt the snow,  
And keepe eternall spring-time on thy face,  
So thou refuse to drinke my dear sonne's blood.

Even when the growth is an evil one, as from the unlawful spring-time tears of Troilus, still it is life that arises from those tears, and not barrenness.

*Pandarus* : . . . he will weepe you, an 'twere a man borne in Aprill.

*Cressida* : And Ile spring up in his teares, an 'twere a nettle against May.

As the play progresses, Lear knows that he has become Nothing. But with that knowledge of Nothingness comes patience. 'Nothing.' 'Patience.' These two words, and the words 'Good Night' echo through the play.

At first, powerful and ancient as the heavens, the great King calls upon them, as upon an equal, to avenge him upon his unnatural offspring.

. . . . O heavens,  
If you do love olde men, if your sweet sway  
Allow Obedience, if yourselves are old,  
Make it your cause; Send downe and take my part.

Act II. Scene IV.

But Nature, his mother, having heard the appalling curse he pronounces upon his child :

Dry up in her the organs of increase

—seeing in this prayer a crime against her holiest laws, an unnatural abomination, turns the prayer :

All the stor'd Vengeances of heaven fall  
On her ingratefull top!

against him, pours 'the extremitie of the skies' upon his uncover'd head.

'How many Oceans of Water would be necessary to compose this great Ocean, rowling in the Air without bounds or banks. . . .'  
'Some great violence has been offered to Nature, such as we suppose to have been in the General Deluge, when the frame of the Earth was broken.'\*

Certainly there had been some change in Nature, or some violence offered her.

'How else,' said Nietzsche, writing of the Oedipus myth, 'could one force Nature to surrender her secrets but by victoriously opposing her . . . i.e. by means of the unnatural. It is this intuition I see imprinted in the awful riddle of the destiny of Oedipus . . . the man who solves the riddle of Nature . . . that double-constituted Sphinx, must also, as the murderer of his father, the husband of his mother, break the holiest laws of Nature. . . .'

In this play, we see the upheaval of all Nature, the reversal of all histories.

In the beginning of the legend, Cronos devoured his own offspring. In *King Lear*, the brood devours the parent. In the myth of Oedipus, son of Laius, King of Thebes, the Theban King learned

\*Burnet: *The History of the Earth*.

from the oracle that he was destined to die by the hand of his own son. Therefore that son was exposed upon Mount Cithaeron, immediately after his birth, with his hands and feet pierced and tied together. Here it is Lear, the father, who, having first cast from his bosom his child Cordelia, is then shut from the gates to wander under the extremities of the skies, as an outcast. The eyes, not feet, of Gloucester, the father of Edmund and the smaller echo of the great King, are pierced, and he is thrust outside the gates to wander in blindness.

In the fourth scene of the third act, when Lear says 'I'll talk with this same learned Theban,' the outcast King has reversed his rôle. He is no longer Oedipus, but is the Sphinx, who must ask the great question. And it is the naked man exposed upon the mountains—one more naked even than the questioner, one who has nothing but his bare humanity, who is now Oedipus, son of the King of Thebes, who can give an answer to the question. No longer does the Sphinx, as in the ancient legend, put an oblique question, to which the answer is 'This is Man.' Instead, bare and terrible, the question is put. Lear, the Sphinx, asks 'Is Man no more than this?'

But, in this work of the eternal Night, no answer comes from the Naked Man—no direct answer, only a few meaningless words, like dust from the ruins. But behind that huddle of meaningless words lies the true answer: 'Man is Nothing.'

The sound of the word Nothing reverberates through the play.

Almost at the beginning, Lear and his daughter reply to each other with this word:

*Lear:* Speak.

*Cordelia:* Nothing, my lord.

*Lear:* Nothing?

*Cordelia:* Nothing.

*Lear:* Nothing will come of nothing. . . .

Act I. Scene I.

There are echoes of this in the 4th scene of Act I.

*Fool:* Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

*Lear:* Why no, boy, nothing can be made out of nothing.

And again:

*The Fool:* Now thou art an o without a figure.

I am better than thou art now; I am a foole, thou art nothing.

This is Man, with his 'lendings' off.

When, in the second scene of the 1st Act, Gloucester, asking to see the letter Edmund pretends to have received from his brother, says, 'The quality of nothing hath not suche neede to hide it selfe,' it seems like one of those strange echoes, or sybillic utterances, which abound in Shakespeare.

Through the night of the soul, a terrible wisdom comes to the mad King and his blind and lesser prototype. Gloucester says :

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes,  
I stumbled when I saw.

Act IV. I.

The lust of the eyes, the pride of the heart, are gone.

. . . . .

The play would seem to be largely a diatribe against procreation.

*Edgar:* The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us:  
The dark and vitious place where thee he got  
Cost him his eyes.

*Gloucester to Lear:* Dost thou know me ?

*Lear, to the eyeless Gloucester:* I remember thine eyes well enough.  
Dost thou squinny at me ? No, doe thy worst, blind Cupid,  
Ile not love.

*Lear:* Is it the fashion that discarded Fathers  
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh ?  
Judicious punishment ! t'was this flesh begot  
Those Pelicane Daughters.

*Lear crying:*

No, they cannot touch me for coyning:  
I am the King himselfe

—the coining to which he refers is, I think, the procreation of his two elder daughters, that base metal.

The lusts of the heart and of the flesh will not keep the body warm in the face of Death.

*Fool:* . . . Now a little fire in a wide field, were like an old Letcher's heart, a small sparke, all the rest on's body cold. Look !  
(as Gloucester approaches), here comes a walking fire.

At first, however, procreation seems the greatest good, and the purpose of mankind. Lear calls upon his mother and goddess, Nature, to curse Goneril with sterility :

Heare Nature, heare! deere Goddesses, heare!  
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend  
To make this Creature fruitfull.  
Into her Wombe convey sterility,  
Dry up in her the Organs of increase,  
And from her derogate body, never spring  
A Babe to honor her. If she must teeme,  
Create her child of Spleene, that it may live  
And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her,  
Let it stampe wrinkles in her brow of youth,  
With cadent Teares fret Channels in her cheekes,  
Turne all her Mother's paines and benefits

## SOME NOTES ON KING LEAR

To laughter and contempt: That she may feelee,  
 How sharper than a Serpent's tooth it is,  
 To have a thankless Childe. Away, away.

(Here, the second and third lines—it must be remembered that the third line was then pronounced with each syllable sounding—

To make this cre-a-ture fru-it-full

have no pause—move with the slow irresistible power and horror of a tidal wave. There are pauses of uneven lengths, as if the earth had been worn into chasms by the retreating flood of passion. Sometimes, there seems to be an upheaval of the earth itself, as in the sounds of the words 'sterility,' 'derogate.')

At one moment of his madness, the voice of Lear, the great King, pardoning the life of a man who should die for the sin of adultery, changes to that of Nature herself, blessing the procreation of all life :

Thou shalt not dye: dye for Adultery! No:  
 The Wren goes too 't, and the small gilded Flye  
 Do's letcher in my sight.  
 Let Copulation thrive; for Gloucester's bastard Son  
 Was kinder to his father than my Daughters  
 Got 'twene the lawfull sheets.  
 Too 't Luxury, pell-mell! for I lacke Souldiers.

The first part of this speech is beneficent but unseeing, like the sun whose warmth brings into being the life hidden in insect's egg, in chrysalis on a garden wall.

After this, the voice that speaks is no longer that of Nature alone, but is also, once again, that of the King who may condemn. The two voices are fused into one as, in uncaring tones, the true reason of life is divulged : struggle and destruction :

. . . I lacke Souldiers.

This is followed by the Stygian, smirching darkness of Lear's invective against Woman, the lustful, the life-giving. This darkness at first has shape, but then crumbles, falls at last into that Chaos in which the world will end.

It is not for nothing that the vastly formed verse of the first lines, blessing the procreation of life, gutters down gradually into an unshaped prose :

Behold your simp'ring Dame,  
 Whose face between her Forkes presages snow;  
 That minces virtue, and do's shake the head  
 To heare of pleasure's name;  
 The Fitchew nor the soyled horse goes too 't  
 With a more riotous appetite.  
 Downe from the waste they are Centaures,  
 Though Women all above:  
 But to the Girdle doe the gods inherit,  
 Beneath is all the fiends.

'There's hell, there's darknesse, there is the sulphurous pit; Burning, scalding, consumption; Fye, fie, fie, pah! pah! Give me an Ounce of Civet; good apothecary sweeten my imagination; There's money for thee.'

'Are not all things generated out of their opposites? I mean such things as good and evil, just and unjust? . . . And I want to show that in all opposites there is of necessity a similar alternation; I mean to say, for example, that anything which becomes great must become greater after being less.'

Thus spoke Socrates, just before his death; and the words were reported by Plato in the *Phaedo Dialogue*, which, with all humility, I believe may possibly have been in Shakespeare's mind at the time of the creation of certain passages in *King Lear*.\* From Lear (the element of fire, the will, the pride, the passion, which are the essence of fire) generated the endless cold of Goneril and Regan. To become greater, Lear became less. Out of his madness was born his wisdom.

In the first scene of the play, we see the ancient King take coldness to his heart, for all his denial:

*Lear:* So young and so untender?

*Cordelia:* So young, my Lord, and true.

*Lear:* Let it be so, thy truth then be thy dowre  
For by the sacred radiance of the Sunne,  
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,  
By all the operations of the Orbes,  
From whom we do exist and cease to be,  
Here I disclaime all my Paternale care,  
Propinquity and property of blood  
And as a stranger to my heart and me,  
Hold thee from this for ever. The barbarous Scythian,  
Or he that makes his generation messes  
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosome  
Be as well neighbour'd, pittied and relieved,  
As thou my some-time daughter.

At that moment, he lays his heart bare to the cold. Shuddering at the barbarous Scythian

And he that makes his generation messes

(he who devours those of his own begetting) Lear lays his heart open to the mercy of the brood that tear and devour their begetter. So he moves into the universe of the cold.

When Lear says, to his daughter, 'Your name, fair Gentlewoman,' this is as quiet as Death, or as Goneril's death-dealing words. But

\* Since writing the above, Dr. E. M. W. Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* has appeared. In this work, on p. 5, Dr. Tillyard, referring to Lorenzo's speech about music and the heavens in *The Merchant of Venice*, declares that this 'shows an accurate knowledge of a part of Plato's *Timæus*.'



the quiet of this sentence of Lear's is that of a volcano before an earthquake. Regan's words

I pray you father: being weake, seeme so  
might be the cry of the Furies in the 9th Canto of the *Inferno* :

Vegna Medusa, si'l farem di smalto.\*

But this Fury need call no Medusa to her aid. Stone herself, she changes all to stone. Even the cry of the Fury is no more a cry : the cold has frozen it to a whisper.

Her voice seems dying away in the cold, at the end of each phrase :

O, sir, you are old,/
 Nature in you stands at the very verge  
Of her confine: / You should be rul'd and led  
By some discretion that discernes your state  
Better than you your selfe. / Therefore I pray you  
That to our Sister you do make returne: /  
Say you have wrong'd her sir. /

Goneril's answer to the cry of Lear :

How sharper than a Serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless Childe  
Never afflict your selfe to know the cause,  
But let his disposition have that scope  
That dotage gives it

is uncaring as the heavens.

Of the two sisters, she is the greater—in evil, in force, in coldness. The difference between them is seen when Regan says of Gloucester :

Hang him instantly.

The colder, infinitely more terrible Goneril says :

Plucke out his eyecs.

'He' (Shakespeare) 'seems to have been asking himself,' said Dr. Bradley, 'whether that which he loathes in man, may not be due to some strange wrenching of the frame of things, through which the lower animal souls have found a lodgement in human forms, and there found, to the horror and confusion of the thinking mind—brains to forge, tongues to speak, and hands to execute enormities which no mere brute can conceive or execute. He shows us in *King Lear* these terrible forces bursting into monstrous life and flinging themselves upon these human beings who are weak and defenceless, partly from old age, partly because they are human and lack the dreadful undivided energy of the beast.'

'Thou chang'd and self-cover'd thing, for shame'

says Albany to Goneril. And constantly Lear refers to the covering

\* Let come Medusa, and change we her to stone.—*tran.* : L. BINYON.

of man. It is as if these beings wished to hide their evil souls, taking upon themselves the covering of the beast.

There are references to the 'detested kite,' or to the 'false of heart, light of eare, bloody of hand, hog in sloth, Fox in stealth, Wolfe in greedinesse, Dog in madnesse, Lyon in prey.'

And in this world of the cold thinking of Lear's 'dogge-hearted daughters' we see another circle of Hell, where

Poschia vid' io mille visi cagnazzi  
fatti per freddo ; onde mi vien riprezzo,  
e verra sempre, de gelati guazzi.\*

There is a passage relating to the transference of the baser human souls into the bodies of certain animals, in the *Phaedo Dialogue*—that Dialogue which (as I have said already) I would suggest, humbly, may have been from time to time in the mind of Shakespeare during the writing of this play.

When, in Act III, Scene IV, Lear says of the supposed madman, Edgar, 'I'd talke a word with his same learned Theban'—may not the Theban have been at once Oedipus, son of the King of Thebes—he who could answer the question of the Sphinx—and one of those two Thebans who were the last companions of Socrates, when, released from his chains, he awaited Death. We read of their conversations with Socrates in the *Phaedo Dialogue*.

'The execution of Socrates having been deferred' (I quote from the Analysis by Jowett), 'Socrates talks with two Thebans, Simmias and Cebes, whom by his enchantments he has attracted from Thebes.'

In the actual dialogue, after a long discussion about the evils of the body and of the senses, and the lusts of the body, and of the vain nature of the clothing of Man, it is asked : 'Have sight and healing any truth in them?' Comes the answer . . . 'He' (who) 'has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and of the whole body, which he conceives of only as a disturbing element, hindering the soul from the acquisition of truth and knowledge . . . is not this the sort of man who, if any man, is likely to attain to the knowledge of true being?'

Later, Socrates says to the two Thebans, 'Like children you are haunted with a fear that when the soul leaves the body, the wind may really blow her away, and scatter her ; especially if a man should happen to die in a great storm, and not when the sky is calm.'

To which Cebes answers : 'Then, Socrates, you must argue us out of our fears—and yet, strictly speaking, they are not our fears ; but there is a child within us to whom death is a sort of hobgoblin : him too we must persuade not to be afraid when he is alone in the dark.'

\* 'Then saw I countless visages, alas!  
Dog-like with cold, that made me shudder, and still  
The shudder comes when frozen pools I pass.'—*trans.* : L. BINYON.

In King Lear, the most terrible work of human genius, we have one to whom the darkness of the mind brought a wisdom greater than that of Socrates—one who, like Socrates, is about to cast from him the chains of the body—speaking, in a great storm, of the vain nature of the clothing of Man—comforting one who is alone in the dark through the blindness of the eyes, but who had said ‘I stumbled when I saw.’

The great King who had known all splendours, all the richness of life, and its true worth, comforts the destitute—him from whom even the sight of the world has been taken—saying to him ‘A man may see how the world goes without eyes,’ and

Thou must be patient: we came crying hither:  
Thou know’st the first time that we smel the Ayre  
We wawle and cry. I will preache to thee Marke.

.....  
When we are borne we crië that wee are come  
To this great stage of foolles.

While the young man who has worn the rags and known the nakedness of the beggar, comforts those who must live, speaks of the sweetness of living :

Edgar: O! our lives’ sweetness  
That we the paine of death would hourelly dye  
Rather than dye at once—taught me to shift  
Into a mad man’s ragges, to assume a semblance  
That very Dogges disdain’d.

Act V. Scene III.

(‘Are not all things generated out of their opposites?’)

May there not possibly be another reference to the *Phaedo Dialogue* in the words uttered by Edgar?

Nero is an angler in the lake of darknesse.

Socrates, speaking of the judgment of the Dead, calls to mind the Stygian river, that falls into and forms the lake Styx. . . . He then says : ‘Those who, for example, have done such violence to a father or to a mother, and have repented for the remainder of their lives . . . these are plunged into Tartarus, the pains of which they are compelled to undergo for a year—but at the end of the year, the wave cast them forth—mere homicides by Cocytus, parricides and matricides by Pyriphlegethon—and they are borne to the Acherusian lake, and there they lift up their voices and call upon their victims whom they have slain and wronged, to have pity on them, and be kind to them, and let them come out into the lake.’

Here, then, in this universe where child turns against parent, Nature, the mother, against Man, Nero, who slew his own mother, angles in the ‘lake of darkness.’

An agonized human heart ‘cries sleepe to death’ throughout the

play. It was, I think, his heart that was the 'drum' of which the King speaks when summoning Regan and Cornwall :

... bid them come forth and heare me,  
Or at their chamber doore Ile beat the Drum  
Till it cry sleepe to death.

## Act II. Scene IV.

for next, he cries :

O me, my heart! my rising heart! but downe!

It is on our hearts, also, that he beats.

How shall it be explained by what sublime genius, this old King, so wilful, so terrible in his passions, is yet so near to our hearts that we would cradle him in our arms like a child.

And cradled he is, for all his greatness, like the child whom we must 'persuade not to be afraid when he is alone in the dark.'

So did those few loving beings who remained to him—Kent, for instance, and the blind Gloucester, see him. When he must be removed from the danger of capture, Gloucester said to Kent :

'Good friend, I prithee take him in thy armes.'

And there is the moving sentence of Kent's, towards the end :

'I am come

To bid my King and master aye good night.'

## Act V. Scene III.

—when the great King is once more seen as a child who must be comforted before the darkness of his eternal night.

Sometimes all becomes a lullaby, spoken by those who are about to sleep and who would not be distracted by the noise of this world, or by weeping, those who are patient though they are hungry and cold, because death will mean shelter, and the morning beyond the grave will know no hunger.

*Lear*: Make no noise, make no noise; draw the curtains:  
so, so, so. We'll go to supper i' the morning:  
so, so, so.

*Fool*: And I'll go to bed at noon.!

## Act III. Scene VI.

The Fool's speech has been taken by several commentators as referring to his approaching death. To some writers on *Lear*, it has seemed mysterious that no *explicit* mention is made of the death of Lear's 'poor boy.' Yet, said Dr. Bradley, 'the action is doubled, it is admitted, of Lear and Gloucester. Why should not the fate of the two most simple and innocent characters—the two who will tell Lear the truth, be duplicated? When Lear says :

And my poor fool is hang'd

is he not referring, both to his poor boy, and his girl?'

Mr. John Gielgud said in the course of conversation (and with great kindness allows me to quote this) that at the time when *Lear* was produced, Cordelia and the Fool were in all probability played by the same boy. Therefore the audience, hearing of Cordelia's death, would see, and hear, in their minds, also the face and the voice of Lear's 'poor boy.'

I think it seems, when Lear says :

*And my poor foole is hang'd*

that the 'and' points to the fact that Lear is speaking, not only of Cordelia, but of a second being.

After the piteous humility of the moment when the King proclaims himself no higher than the beggar at whom the dogs bark

... The little dogges and all,  
Tray, Blanch, and Sweet-hart, see they barke at me.

And

... You must bear with me.  
Pray you now, forget and forgive; I am old and foolish.

—although there are moments when he thinks that the mortal wound to his brain was gained in battle :

Let me have surgeons,  
I am cut to th' Braines.

Act IV. Scene VI.

the two beings—Cordelia, from whose sorrows

All bless'd secrets,  
All you unpublish'd Vertues of the earth  
Spring with my teares

and the old King whose eyes are

... garden water-pots,  
Ay, and laying Autumn's dust

await the oncoming darkness.

When King Lear says :

Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir  
—he is, I think, asking to be released from his outworn life . . . from his 'lendings.' So little a thing is Death to him now—only the undoing of a button.

. . . . .

The sound of the verse is now of an unparalleled grandeur, now of an equal sweetness and tenderness.

Sometimes, as in the gigantic curses pronounced by the old King, it seems as if 'the Heavens and the Earth were coming together, the

Sun coming down and the Earth going to take its place above.' In such lines as Lear's

Detested kite, thou liest  
and

Beat at this gate that let thy folly in  
the single-syllabled words have the hugeness of those new-made stones that Deucalion and Pyrrha found and cast behind their backs, when the Deluge was over—the bones of their mother Earth, which then were broken in pieces, in that great ruin. On these, a haggard light seems to beat.

But, towards the end, there is the change from the anguish of

You do me wrong to take me out of the grave:  
Thou art a soule in blisse, but I am bound  
Upon a wheele of fire, that mine own teares  
Do scald, like molten Lead

to the gentleness, the consoling and tender darkness of lines spoken by one to whom a world-wide ruin has taught wisdom and resignation :

No, no, no, no. Come let's away to prison;  
We two will sing like Birds i' the Cage:  
When thou dost aske me blessing, Ile kneele downe  
And aske of thee forgiveness: So we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded Butterflies: and heere poor Rogues  
Talke of Court newes, and we'll talke with them too,  
Who looses, and who wins; who's in, who's out;  
And take upon 's the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies: and we'll weare out  
In a wall'd prison, packes and sects of great ones,  
That ebbe and flowe by the Moone.

The passages which come immediately before the death of Cordelia have all this heart-breaking sweetness. Is there another poet in the world who would have dared the use of that five-times-repeated trochee in the second line quoted below :

Thou'lt come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never.

—trochees that with each repetition seem dropping further into darkness? Is there another poet in the world who could have wrung, from the simple repetition of one word, such tears?

# The Case of Knut Hamsun

By HEINRICH FISCHER

*Translated from the German by David Maurice Graham*

## I

It is a special mark of the great novelist that he strives to realize the full creative conception of his work in a completed 'Cosmos.' With each new novel a predetermined inner world moves forward more clearly out of the shadows, small subsidiary characters from one book appear years later as the chief characters in another, a new landscape suddenly takes on the dreamlike quality of the *déjà vu*, of a landscape we seem to have known for many years. This universality is no mere matter of 'epic breadth,' but rather of creative depth. Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* is no Cosmos; but Zola's Rougon-Macquart series surely is. Joseph's world in Thomas Mann, though a rough draft on a grand scale, is no Cosmos, but the Parisian world of Lucien de Rubempré in Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* is a Cosmos indeed. And quite certainly, by the standards of creative art, the world of Knut Hamsun is a Cosmos, doubly fascinating because he has mastered a wide field of our ideas and our own times.

Hamsun's world is essentially a pagan world. The fundamental idea of this pagan Cosmos is perhaps best illustrated by a passage from D. H. Lawrence's *Apocalypse*; indeed in his imaginative writing Knut Hamsun's report on the nature of the world has a certain resemblance to Lawrence's. Lawrence says about the pagan Cosmos of the Greeks: 'It is very difficult for us to understand the pagan mind. Everything is a "thing," and every "thing" acts and has effect; the universe is a great complex activity of things existing and moving and having effect. And all this is God. To-day, it is almost impossible for us to realize what the old meant by God or "Theos." Everything was "Theos"; but even so not at the same moment. At the moment, *whatever struck you was god*. If it was a pool of water, the very watery pool might strike you: then that was god; or thirst might overcome you at the sight of the water: then the thirst itself was god; or you felt the sudden chill of the water as you touched it: and then another god came into being, "the cold"; and this was not a *quality*, it was an existing entity, almost a creature, certainly a god: the cold . . .'

Hamsun's world is full of these gods. The first of his gods was 'Hunger.' It inspired him to a work of art which was no discursive exposition of the social or psychological phenomena of a man who is hungry; it was rather the flight and pursuit of a man hunted, for the

sheer pleasure of the chase, by a cruel, mocking little god. In his delirium of hunger, half unconscious and at the same time abnormally awake, the hero of the book describes this pastime of his particular hostile god in these words: 'The Lord God pushed His finger into the net of my nerves gently—here a little, there a little—bringing some slight disorder among the threads. And then the Lord took His finger away, and there were fibres and filaments, delicate roots, the nerve threads still sticking to His finger. And after the finger there was a gaping cold, for the finger was the Lord's, and a wound in my brain in the track of that finger . . .' Throughout Hamsun's works this defencelessness of a man hunted by his particular god recurs; often it is the unmasterable passion for a woman, as in the novels *Mysteries* and *Pan*; or dæmonic possession in elementary sexual form, which takes a woman already growing old and drives her to destruction (in the play *Gone to Hell*); often it is simply some natural elemental force, a lightning stroke, a storm, a fire (as in *Chapter the Last*). In one of the novels, *Vagabonds*, it is even Lawrence's 'watery pool.' In a poor little Lofoten Island village a powerful shipowner comes on the scene, and takes his pleasure with all the women. But there is one woman he ignores. She leads him one day to the edge of a green meadow and says: 'Pick me that flower over there'—and the man goes towards the middle of the meadow and suddenly his feet sink in—the meadow is a bog. And slowly, inch by inch, he disappears, roaring in terror, under the mocking triumphant eyes of the peasant woman, who suddenly takes on, in pagan magnificence, the stature of an avenging Clytemnestra.

A natural kingdom of conflicting forces, without moral laws, a great world and a rich one which leads from the simple ideas of the primitive peasant to the most complicated psychological phenomena in modern journalistic and literary circles—a world in which thousands of human beings are portrayed to the life with perfect artistry down to the last external and internal detail.

## II

Three authors have had a decisive influence in the last decades before 1933 on the intellectual life of the Continent, and above all Germany: in philosophy and theology Søren Kierkegaard, in creative art Dostoevsky, and Hamsun. Only if one has oneself taken part in the intellectual life of this period in central Europe can one fully understand the reasons why. It was an age of intellectual and spiritual breaking-up, an age which had lost any genuine connection with the European tradition—even the connection of a genuine opposition. The editorial offices and literary coffee-houses, the social salons and political lobbies were inhabited by little Nietzschean *Herrenmenschen*, who had got hold, certainly, of Ivan



Karamazov's maxim that 'everything is permissible,' but none of his greatness. And the more significant personalities of that age were filled with the sense of irredeemable despair. It seemed increasingly impossible to give a creative portrait of the noisy chaos and the complicatedly nihilistic fashion of thinking of the new-style intellectual, the cunning subtlety of the mental process which, according to Kierkegaard, consists of 'taking every value and secretly burgling its meaning.'

It began to be seen that this chaotic world of dissolution, with all its psychological contradictions, had been mastered and portrayed by two creative artists: by Hamsun, and, prophetically, by Dostoevsky, the greater of the two. The two were often compared, although the gulf which separates them was seen clearly enough, and although Hamsun's native genius never shows any conscious attraction to Dostoevsky. But the similarity in characters in their works and in psychological situations is striking. Many of the literary figures in Hamsun's novels *Shallow Soil* and *Editor Lyngé* suggest a smaller edition of Dostoevsky's *Demons*; the adventurer Nagel in Hamsun's *Mysteries*, with his self-laceration of soul which finally drives him to suicide, is a brother of Stavrogin, and the proud Viktoria in Hamsun's story named after her is a sister of Aglaya in Dostoevsky's *Idiot*. And above all the world of both writers seemed to be filled in the same way with thousands of contradictions, as many-sided as life itself.

But it is precisely in this point—the contradictions—that the decisive difference between Dostoevsky and Hamsun becomes clear. In his essay on Dostoevsky (in *New Writing and Daylight*, winter 1943), the aphoristic method of which penetrates to the deepest roots of its subject, Demetrios Capetanakis writes: 'Dostoevsky is a writer full of contradictions, and he can be described only in a paradoxical way.' And again: 'If one tried to build a system out of the various thoughts Dostoevsky expressed about life, one would fail. It is true that in his works all the most important problems of human existence are discussed, and that in them one finds fascinating aphorisms about life and death, good and evil, God and nothingness. Yet these aphorisms never express Dostoevsky's static views.' This is where I part company with Capetanakis' interpretation. It is true, the doubter and blasphemer is portrayed in Dostoevsky's work with the same objectivity, even with the same love, as the believer. It is true, as Capetanakis says: 'Dostoevsky's work is a long trial at which God is being judged but which cannot come to a verdict'—provided one understands by the word 'verdict' not only the formation of a judgment but also the public recitation of it. But, taken as a whole, the world of Dostoevsky, like the world of Kierkegaard, points to a conclusion, and in this they are unlike the world of Hamsun. The conclusion they reach happens also to be the conclusion of faith. This

means that Dostoevsky's 'contradictions' are in reality the statement of 'premisses.' 'I am a fanatic for premisses,' Dostoevsky said of himself; *all* the premisses from the world of experience must be clearly stated before the conclusion of faith can be shown to be a valid conclusion. This wealth of premisses—there are almost more of them than one can grasp—and their depth, leads him, as Capetanakis says, up to the 'extreme limits of inhumanity,' but at the last moment—before he drowns—he is rescued by the conclusion of faith. Seen in this way, Dostoevsky's intellectual world, quite apart from its significance as a work of art, has the value of a comprehensive—the most encyclopedically comprehensive—typology of world views; it is a gallery of portraits which is also a gallery of views of the world. It is no accident that in spite of all Dostoevsky's realistic and psychological diversity, the same two fundamental types are portrayed again and again: on the one side the brilliant dæmonic rebel against God—Ivan Karamazov, Stavrogin—and on the other side the no less fascinating type of the believer—Alyosha, Prince Mishkin; and it is no accident that the dæmonic type always ends in madness or suicide. This typological instruction by concrete examples (which naturally takes on a far more complicated form under Dostoevsky's creative hands than appears from this description) goes so far that in different novels precisely the same situations recur to show the reaction of the one type of person in his typical way. In the *Idiot*, just as in *Demons*, for example, the hero gets a box on the ear from his enemy; the reaction in both cases is outwardly the same: both Mishkin and Stavrogin accept the blow, without striking back. But the Christian Prince Mishkin thinks only of his enemy's sin and cries out: 'O how you will repent that'; Stavrogin, for whose pride a box on the ear is the most shameful humiliation in the world, clenches his hands in the enormous effort not to strike back—he enters with enjoyment into a trial of strength, the highest trial of strength which can be offered him.

It is this typological significance which marks a decisive difference between Dostoevsky's work and Hamsun's. Hamsun's world knows no 'premisses,' only contradictions; his characters are the chaotic products of a wildly luxuriant soil, whether the soil of the peasant or the asphalt of the cities. And it is characteristic that from the first the few politically doctrinaire passages in Hamsun's earlier works are given up to the glorification of 'the soil'—later on this was to turn into an ominous political tendency. In his novel *Growth of the Soil* there is a passage which runs: 'No, a man of the wilds did not lose his head . . . A man of the wilds was not put out by the thought of great things he could not get—art, newspapers, luxuries, politics, and such-like were worth just what people were willing to pay for them, no more. Growth of the soil was something different, something to be got at any price—the only source, the origin of all. A lonely

life and a mean one? Far from it. A man had everything—his own higher powers, his dreams, his loves, all the richness of his superstition.' But in the years I am speaking about—the decades before 1933—it was not this part of Hamsun's work which won him his influence among young intellectuals of Germany; it was in fact precisely the way he brought to life in his work 'art, newspapers, luxuries, politics, and such-like,' the crystal-clear mirror he held to the literary life of the modern world with all its cunning moves and counter moves—this was what the younger generation, before the year 1933, greeted with enthusiasm. It so happened that two novels were published in Germany about sanatorium life in one and the same year: Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* and Hamsun's *Chapter The Last*. Both were highly successful. But how tame and bourgeois we thought the Davos love story of the *Magic Mountain* beside the eerily adventurous world of the Norwegian sanatorium, which seemed to have locked within it all the passions and tragedies of our times! How fascinating was that glittering creature, Mademoiselle d'Espard, who finally emerged from her mask as a little office girl; or the seductive Herr Fleming, who played the *bon vivant* of the sanatorium for a few weeks with money he had stolen; above all, the macabre conversations between Herr Moss, whose body was rotting away bit by bit from a terrible disease, and 'the Suicide,' who, after the sanatorium was burnt down, was the only one whose miserable life could find no end. This sanatorium, with its almost inextricable intrigues and shabby vanities, seemed to us a stupendous symbol of the present time.

### III

The world of the great epic writer is a world of ideas—which he expresses in terms of reality—social, economic and political reality. But the elements of everyday life suffer a sea change into the world of his creative art, and terms take on new meanings as he works with them. What is dangerous is that their names are still the same in his imaginary world as they were in the world of reality: aristocracy, democracy, individual, mass. And if the imaginative writer begins to find his political construction more important than his artistic creation, if, from some personal sympathy or antipathy, he seriously disturbs the predetermined balance and proportion of his world, then this new world of his must become a zeugma of art with politics, which may have highly confusing and dangerous effects. This was how things developed with Hamsun.

When the young Hamsun wrote his first novels, the two most important social developments on the Continent were the dissolution of the liberal social order and, on the other side, the rising power and influence of the working class. Hamsun regarded both with distaste,

a distaste which originally had nothing political about it ; it was a purely intellectual distaste. He saw—and at that time there was some truth in his seeing—a serious danger for the development of our civilization in the increasing strength of ‘anonymous’ and ‘levelling’ forces. These forces were embodied for him in the social phenomenon of the effect of success on the successful career socialists, in the economic phenomenon of the strictly secret intrigues of the great banks and industrial concerns, and in the literary phenomenon of the anonymous power of the press. In the novel *Editor Lyng* he tried to show how the mechanization of intellectual performance in the press is able to level down and destroy the individuality of the writer. At this time Hamsun’s declaration of war against the anonymity of the modern social order had much in common with the polemics of his fellow Scandinavian Kierkegaard, who wrote, for example, this passage in his *Point of View*, which, word for word—including the passionate note in the language—might have been written by the young Hamsun : ‘The fact that an anonymous author by the help of the press can day by day find occasion to say (even about intellectual, moral, and religious matters) whatever he pleases to say, and what perhaps he would be very far from having the courage to say as an individual ; that every time he opens his mouth (or shall we say his abysmal gullet?) he at once is addressing thousands of thousands ; that he can get ten thousand times ten thousand to repeat after him what he has said—and with all this nobody has any responsibility, so that it is not as in ancient times the relatively unrepentant crowd which possesses omnipotence, but the absolutely unrepentant thing, a nobody, an anonymity, who is the producer (*auctor*), and another anonymity, the public, sometimes even anonymous subscribers, and with all this, nobody, nobody !’

That was the leading thesis of the young Hamsun : the ‘anonymous crowd’ is the arch-enemy. But whereas in Kierkegaard the term ‘crowd’ is a pure intellectual concept quite innocent of political picking and choosing—so that a ‘crowd’ of priests, aristocrats or captains of industry is just as much a negative value as, for example, a ‘crowd’ of trade unionists—in Hamsun, on the other hand, this term ‘crowd’ becomes more and more a narrow political anti-progressive monomania. It is not long before Hamsun equates ‘crowd’ with ‘democracy.’ ‘Democracy’ includes for him everything petty, mean, unheroic—a flat and empty life, in which there is neither brightness nor adventure left, nothing but dull, prudent calculation. At first, as long as expressions of political opinion took up only a very small part of his many-sided creative work, that seemed no more than a private crotchet. But, if one re-reads Hamsun’s novels today, one sees very clearly how since about 1910 every book he wrote showed that his aggressive political obsession was growing on him

and more and more decisively spoiling the artistic balance of his work. Particularly interesting in the record of Hamsun's internal conflict are the works of the transition period, in which he was still trying to slip reactionary slogans into his artistically revolutionary world of ideas so cautiously that they would not seriously damage it. The clearest example was his play *Sunset*, which was produced in Germany at the beginning of the 1920's. This play dealt with a problem which, for the intellectual youth of Germany—and especially for the youth of the Left—was highly important: the successful revolutionary drowned in the comfort of bourgeois success. The main character in the play is a man of 50 who, twenty years before, had been an uncompromising fighter on the side of youth; and now the play shows how society, State and family gradually turn the revolutionary into a bourgeois, *without his noticing it himself*. This man's antagonist in the play is a young student who suddenly bursts into his house and tries to shake him mentally awake again; the dramatic struggle for the soul of the one-time revolutionary is carried to the extreme conclusion: when no argument avails, the young student fires a revolver shot at the passive hero. He misses, and the revolutionary of yesterday mumbles in empty phrases his excuses for his own weakness and goes under for good and all, spiritually dead. That was a deeply impressive theme for us in Germany: we saw the same drama being played on the political stage before our very eyes in the characters of the one-time revolutionary socialists, from Braun to Scheidemann. Hamsun's play stirred us deeply. Admittedly it seemed to us curious that in the two or three specifically political passages in the play the ideals of the revolutionary were evidently reactionary ideals; but that seemed unimportant in comparison with the revolutionary attitude of spirit and the passionately anti-bourgeois atmosphere of the play. It was only years later that we saw how important after all these political opinions were for Hamsun—we saw it for the first time quite clearly in the two novels *Children of the Age* and *Segelfoss Town*, which may be taken to some extent as representing Hamsun's political confession of faith.

#### IV

At the beginning of this essay I tried to give a sketch in brief outline of Hamsun's *Cosmos*. It is necessary to remind oneself of this great world of Hamsun the creative artist if one is to understand the point where the narrow world of Hamsun the politician began. Man in Hamsun's *Cosmos*—as I said at the beginning—is a nothing, hunted by gods. But when his doom is near he has one weapon left if he is great and strong enough to use it: it is the weapon of his pride, which laughingly accepts his destiny and so cheats the gods of their sport. This fundamental motif comes up again and

again in Hamsun's works, and it is undoubtedly his favourite motif. About one of his heroes, who is gradually drinking himself to death, Hamsun says : ' Baardsen did not eat ; no, but he drank. And yet it was no vice that made him drink, it was not out of weakness in order to make his life bearable, nor from despair in order to end it. Was Baardsen weak ? Far from it. It is true, all prudent people must turn their backs on him. But what a great burly dare-devil of a fellow he was, even in his downfall ! ' And in *Hunger* the hero in the last stage of his agony cries out : ' I tell you, you damned holy Baal in Heaven, that I am on the point of death ; and yet I laugh at you ! You Apis God in Heaven, with death staring me in the face I tell you, I would rather be a slave in hell than a free man in your celestial mansions ! '

Did Hamsun derive his conception from Nietzsche ? The resemblance is evident. Nietzsche's ' many too many ' and Hamsun's ' crowd,' Nietzsche's ' Herrenmensch ' and Hamsun's ' Aristocrat,' Nietzsche's ' Dionysian Dancer ' and Hamsun's ' Adventurer.' But passion, colour and action in Hamsun's characters is so personal that one is inclined rather to believe that we have here an independent parallel in time rather than any derivation. And if Nietzsche's ideas have been carried by his successors to political shallows in a way that has had dire consequences, Hamsun has taken the same step himself in his own work.

In the novel *Children of the Age*, for the first time in Hamsun's development, the creative process was definitely overwhelmed by the political theory. In this book appear all the values of his theoretical construction—their names are Race, Myth, Blood and Soil, Discipline, Solitariness, Adventure. The very setting of the novel is symbolical : a primeval manorial estate in Norway on a high cliff above the sea. Here live, in solitary isolation, two human beings—one man and one woman—both aristocrats in blood and mind ; he the representative of an ancient Norwegian family, she the last survival of a family of the Prussian nobility. In a tragedy of marriage—of a grimness which makes Strindberg seem a kind-hearted teller of fairytales—we are shown this man and this woman locked in a deadly duel of pride against pride. But alongside this significant psychological action there runs a political theme which comes more and more into the foreground with every chapter. The little patriarchal peasant community round the manor house—about a hundred souls—is gradually corrupted by the modern ideas of democracy. If the aristocrat—he has got a name, Holmsen, but Hamsun, typically, almost always calls him simply ' The Lieutenant '—if then the Lieutenant walks through his village now—tall, haggard, stooping, with heavily lined face, and always riding whip in hand—then the people no longer doff their caps as quickly as they used to do, they

murmur behind his back, a new spirit of disquiet is knocking at the door of this primeval world. 'The Lieutenant' is the last man left to defend it—and in his rearguard action a very important part is played by the riding whip. 'They obey the lash'—'They need the lash'—'They are only happy under the lash.' These observations of Hamsun's come more and more frequently, and when the Lieutenant strikes one of the disrespectful villagers in the face with his whip there is no doubt where the sympathies of the author lie.

Into this little village there comes one day an upstart who has grown rich in South America: Herr Holmengraa—the New King—as Hamsun ironically calls him. Herr Holmengraa is all obsequious devotion for the impoverished Lieutenant, but step by step he takes from him one piece of land after another; he brings progress, money, cheap luxury, he builds a big mill, and ten years later the little village has turned into the town of Segelfoss. In the novel *Segelfoss Town*—which is a direct continuation of *Children of the Age*—Hamsun sets out to give a complete picture of 'rotten democracy.' Let there be no misunderstanding: *Segelfoss Town* is still a real work of art in many passages; the actions and responses of love are painted with great beauty, the destinies of men and women are unrolled before us, fascinate and move us. But in among these psychological excellences a political outlook forces its way which in banality might come from a twelve-year-old school boy. *Segelfoss Town* has in miniature all the institutions of modern society. It has a newspaper—a socialist newspaper—which never writes in anything but the cheapest slogans; every one of its leaders ends with the call: 'Take note, Workers!' or, a still greater favourite: 'Take note, Wage-slaves!' *Segelfoss Town* has democratic and socialist politicians—and every one of them is an ass or takes bribes. *Segelfoss Town* has progressive merchants—and every one of them, behind the cheap elegance of his shop-window, is ready to cheat you. But above all, *Segelfoss* now has 'Workers'—an indolent, insolent mob, who are characterized by the author in these words: 'They are a contemptible crew; they come on bicycles; they wear buckled shoes and all the latest shop-finery; they have adopted everything superficial and worthless in this upstart town, but their character is what it always was—a contemptible crew in every way.' And again and again, in contrast to this *canaille*, Hamsun points with nostalgic love to the figure of the now dead 'Lieutenant': 'Now if it had been the former owner of Segelfoss Estate, the Lieutenant! A cut with his riding whip in the air, the one word "Go!"—he never wasted words—and his eyes glowed like branding-irons; when he clutched his hand round the whip-handle, his knuckles went white; but when he opened his hand to reward someone, he made the hour rich and memorable. It was good to be under him, for he was one of those who could command, he

was a Leader, he was a Master. He needed no golden rings in his ears like the big sloop-skipper from the West Country. Not he ! People made way for him as much as for any man, and no one took liberties with *him*.'

## V

From the glorification of the Lieutenant's whip to the glorification of the whip of the S.S. man was only a step. When barbarism was let loose in Germany and trampled down every value of the spirit, Hamsun stepped forward as a volunteer into its ranks. It was an ironical spectacle : the incompetent enthusiasts for the National Socialist 'Mythos' and the spiritual yokels with their talk about 'the soil'—men who were unable to give significant shape to the thousandfold life of our epoch and therefore dismissed it as 'Asphalt'—proclaimed as their ally a writer who, more perhaps than any other, had tracked down the subtleties of the modern soul and shaped it into a work of art. Their task was easy : for the artist sat down at the same table with the murderers, he flew in the 'Leader's and Master's' private aeroplane to an audience, he accepted 'with reverent thanks' the silver-framed photograph of the Propaganda Minister. It was in its way a grandiose drama of prostitution, the psychological interpretation of which would have been worthy of a Hamsun.

For it should not be forgotten that Hamsun's work, until it was gradually eaten away by the political jargon, was inspired by sympathy with humanity. However 'reactionary' his political views were from the very first, he could not have portrayed with such profundity and passion the lot of the persecuted, the oppressed, the hungry and the dying, if his *heart* had always, from the very first, sided with the persecutors and the oppressors. In his novel *Mysterier* he created an unforgettable scene in which a defenceless cripple is ragged and bullied and knocked about by a pack of drunken louts, for the sheer fun of the thing ; it was—long before Hitler—the perfect picture of the S.S. mentality with all its psychological elements of animal humour and berserk sadism. In this, as in hundreds of other examples, Hamsun showed how profoundly he understood and hated the depths of bestiality in the petty bourgeois. And that brings us to the essential point in Hamsun's case : to the mysterious, abysmal downfall of mind and speech which takes place as soon as this artist steps on to political ground. It is a schizophrenia of a special kind : the one mental world is formed out of profound symbols, the other out of the most hackneyed mass production moulds. One has only to compare, simply by the criterion of the use of language, any passage from Hamsun's novels—even from the weakest works of his last period—with the stammering political baby talk which he uttered, for example, when he was Goebbels' guest in Vienna : 'It is not



enough to conquer the Bolsheviks and the Yankees. It is England which must be overcome. This is not something which I have seen in the stars. It is an opinion firmly founded on what I have seen of England's misbehaviour. My country has had a taste of England's abuse of power, we had its thumbscrew on our trade. Yes, and its Secret Service even inside our own homes. No, it is not something which I have seen in the stars . . .'

Is this fixed idea, this self-willed stubbornness springing from conviction—for Hamsun is not an opportunist—any excuse for what he has done and said in the last few years? It is the sharpest condemnation. Dostoevsky, too, at one period of his life wrote imperialistic and anti-Semitic essays, for example the article *Why must Constantinople become Russian?* or the essay *On the Jewish question*; but when he had to choose between his political theory and the human reality, he came down decisively on the side of the human reality in his *Letters from the Underworld*. The important Viennese writer Karl Kraus, who saw in the conservative forces of the Austrian monarchy a possible ally in his battle against the liberal society in the years before the first world war, threw this political standpoint overboard the moment the first bullet was fired in 1914, because, as he said, 'one suffering creature, who is bullied and driven to the slaughter by these same conservative forces is incomparably more important than the utopian construction of the artist.' These decisions made by Dostoevsky and Karl Kraus were born from horror at the monstrous actions of Tsarist Russia and the Austrian empire. When Hamsun went out to meet the incomparably more appalling actions let loose by Hitler, and when he gave this thing the support of his political ideology, the light of his spirit was put out by his own hand. With his great work he has nothing more to do. It is quite irrelevant now that, somewhere in South Norway, a crotchety old gentleman of 87 is sitting in the midst of his country estate, spending his time with his fish hooks and his patience cards, and now and again having a political fit; it is quite irrelevant that this old gentleman happens to bear the name of Hamsun. Knut Hamsun is dead.

*This essay was written in January 1945. I do not think, however, that the historical events which have since happened in Norway and Germany, and the subsequent arrest of Knut Hamsun, affect my conclusions in the last paragraph.*

# A Greek Poet: Angelos Sikelianos

By HERO PESOPOULOS\*

MODERN Greek Literature, which does not go farther back than the nineteenth century, shows the restless and questing vitality of a young and immature living creation, striving to discover its innate law and destiny.

If we consider the difficulties with which the Greek artist was faced from the very beginning—the overwhelming tradition of a 3,000-years' past on the one hand and the presence of a rich and already established European culture on the other—what Modern Greek Literature has achieved is indeed remarkable. Readers of *New Writing* are already acquainted with some aspects of modern Greek poetry which were so admirably expounded by Demetrios Capetanakis with his characteristic originality and insight in the Autumn number of 1944.

My purpose, however, is not to give a detailed account of modern Greek literature, or to attempt to show the various divergent currents which have struggled to prevail in the creation of a consistent tradition; but to introduce the greatest living Greek poet, who, in my opinion, embodies at this moment the most complete expression of the Hellenic spirit and ranks amongst the poets of international calibre: Angelos Sikelianos.

If his voice could be heard outside Greece, it would speak unflinchingly of the unbroken continuity of Greek life and culture; because I feel, somehow, that in transitional periods like this, the convulsion of historical events which we are now witnessing, may sometimes conceal the full perspective of a nation's evolution. Whereas the creations of the human spirit cannot be easily violated, for a poem or a statue or a cathedral, which emerge like landmarks out of the perpetual flow of history, speak for themselves, and if their message is not understood to-day, it will be to-morrow. This applies to poetry perhaps more than to any other art. Because the real and great poet is both a seer and a teacher. Rooted in his race and his nation, he feeds with the people's dreams and secret yearnings the living tree of his imagination, which, like the sacred oak of Dodona, propounds immortal prophecies. The greater the vitality, the vigour and the creative impetus of the people, the truer and stronger the poet's oracle. His mission is to give form to, and project into our

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lives, like a tangible reality, the fluid dreams and aspirations which the people have striven from time immemorial to materialize in their actions. The great poet, always a forerunner, conquers with the "word" (logos) the undiscovered, virgin spaces of spirit, which at moments of supreme cultural achievement may be reached by the rest of humanity.

I should like to quote that well-known passage from Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*: 'Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and the circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and the blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed and withholds from the barren world the nourishment of the scions of the tree of life.'

Angelos Sikelianos is sixty years old now, a strong and most impressive personality. He was very young when he appeared on the literary scene and with his first great work, the *Alafroiskiotos*, he reached the peaks of poetic achievement. As was to be expected, he was not immediately recognized as a great poet. I do not mean, of course, by the large public which always awakes very slowly indeed to such peculiar phenomena as poets are, but even by the intellectual élite of the country, who did not seem to realize what a tremendous asset Sikelianos was for the cultural evolution of Greece. Even before I left Greece in 1939, very few people knew his work and fewer still really understood it and cared for it. They knew him, though, as the inspirer of the Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930. I shall not go into details about his very bold idea of making Delphi a centre of international culture. But to illustrate what a tremendous impression those performances of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and *The Suppliants* left behind, I shall mention this:—Romagnoli, the well-known Italian scholar who produced ancient Greek tragedies at Syracuse, was invited to Delphi among many other European celebrities. He came in a rather sneering mood to see what those 'Greculi' would do. . . . Asked after the performances what he thought of them, he exclaimed: 'A Syracuse c'est de l'archéologie, ici c'est de la religion.'

It is really during the years of war and occupation, when individuals returned to their soul and tried to find their roots and strengthen them, that Sikelianos's activity increased and his influence spread, till he was acclaimed as our national poet.

Sikelianos marks the creative beginning of the Greek Renaissance. His powerful vision springs directly from the sources of eternal Greece, which is not a country, a nation or a state, but an Idea, embodying itself in ever new symbols and syntheses of universal value.

In an extremely fine essay Virginia Woolf, analysing the cause of that peculiar attraction which ancient Greece has had through the ages, says :

‘ . . . this is that draws us back and back to the Greeks : The stable, the permanent, the original human being is to be found there. The Greeks admit us to a vision of the earth unravaged, the sea unpolluted, the maturity, tried but unbroken, of mankind. Every word is reinforced by a vigour, which pours out of olive tree and temple and the bodies of the young.’ And, further, discussing the power of Greek words she says : ‘ *θάλασσα, θάνατος, άνθρωπος, αστήρ* . . . so clear, so hard, so intense that to speak plainly yet fittingly, without blurring the outlines or clouding the depths, Greek is the only expression. . . . Spare and bare as it is, no language can move more quickly, dancing, shaking, all alive but controlled.’

The fascination that ancient Greece exercises on highly developed and sensitive minds who seek for a clear and true form of life, the nostalgia which flares up, aching for the unsurpassed perfection and mythical atmosphere of the Greek landscape, whenever the world gets sick of its own sickness and the dull and shallow pessimism, and all other -isms, go bankrupt—is a phenomenon so common to our European tradition that it needs no restating. Of course it is a quite different thing in what way that nostalgia will fertilize the imagination of the artists. Classicism, as John Lehmann pointed out, is a very dangerous word—a very dangerous tendency if we don’t find a new content for it.

If I have referred to Virginia Woolf, it is because the poet I am writing about embodies the very characteristics she attributes to the ancient Greek world—characteristics which make it stubbornly endure the test of time. Indeed, if I had to sum up in a sentence the ultimate meaning of his poetry I would have said ‘ He admits us to a vision of the earth unravaged, the sea unpolluted, the maturity, tried but unbroken, of mankind.’

As I have pointed out, Sikelianos reached perfection with his very first poem, the *Alafroiskiotos*. *Alafroiskiotos* means literally the ‘ light-shadowed,’ but it has a particular association in modern Greek folklore. *Alafroiskiotos* is somebody who lives in a world of his own and is endowed with the power to apprehend the mysteries of nature and sense the presence of the spirits of earth and ocean, such as the dryads, nereids and fawns, which stubbornly survive in Greek folklore. Sikelianos takes this modern Greek mythical figure and lifts it to the planes of the creative man who draws his powers from his secret kinship with nature, the eternal and perfect Greek nature. At this first stage of his evolution the poet recaptures the meaning of the Greek tradition and its bewilderingly multifarious landscapes through the medium of Greek nature. Greek nature is “ the moving

immovable " in Greek history and has an artistic and formative value shaping all manifestations of Greek life. *Alafroiskiotos* symbolizes the return of the reincarnated Greek spirit to its native soil. As he emerges from the sacred sleep on the wide vastness of the beach, a perfect body, integrating harmoniously the highest spiritual, æsthetic and moral values and physical qualities, one feels: A new man has arisen for the world with new eyes, new senses, wide open to revelation, and new experiences which enlarge the vision and the achievement of the human race and forecast a new way of life—another step of man's ascension towards his 'idea.' With the *Alafroiskiotos*, Sikelianos threw a vivid patch of light to illuminate another stretch of that dark, unknown field which is man's destiny.

Thus, as the ancient Greeks created in their literature a form of life of universal value, Sikelianos started creating the modern Greek form of life, equally universal. For him poetry is an act of life—as life itself is an act of poetry. The poet has to discover and make accessible and habitable more and more landscapes. As Helios of the ancient myth sees the island of Rhodes hidden in the depths of the ocean, a plot which was destined to prove rich in substance for men and kindly for pasture, so did Sikelianos see Hellas, lying in the depths of history—the Hellas which all of us dreamt of—and brought her forth to light and gave her us, a new-born earth, glittering with all its riches and human beings.

He was then twenty-three years old. And he had already an astounding knowledge of the modern Greek language. His style is bold, his expression rich, and yet clear and restrained, his similes extremely powerful, of an almost homeric quality. He never uses in his images abstract notions or empty metaphors. His words are alive, producing unexpected repercussions, awakening reminiscences of all the great gestures that have ever arisen out of the Hellenic world, reflecting the life of the earth, the seas and the skies, the immense light-flooded skies of Greece.

A friend of mine to whom I read *Alafroiskiotos* exclaimed: 'But it is ancient Greek!' meaning that Sikelianos had given again to our language the vigour, the newness, the directness and correctness of expression, the compactness of ancient Greek. Every single word of his has the unmistakable quality of the genuine inspiration and is saturated with that magic which only great poetry can create. And one has somehow the feeling that he never struggles for expression. It springs rich and spontaneous, and yet correct, never missing its aim. In the hands of Sikelianos modern Greek became a docile and extremely precise vehicle of poetic imagination.

Another thing which characterizes the poetry of Sikelianos is unity and continuity of vision. In *Alafroiskiotos* one finds already the

seeds of his central ideas and the symbols which later on he will evolve and widen until they obtain full vigour and perfection.

The religious philosophies of the ancient Greek mysteries, the doctrines of Heraclitos, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Plato and the essence of Christianity, reveal to him the uninterrupted stream of the Hellenic heritage, and find a new synthesis in his poetry.

Sikelianos has had a prolific output. Among his great works in which he explores and integrates the Greek tradition are *The Prologue to Life* and the *Easter of the Greeks*.

*The Prologue to Life* consists of four long poems called consciousnesses—The Consciousness of my Earth, of my Race, of Woman, of Faith.

The *Easter of the Greeks* contains three odes: To Helen as the symbol of Beauty, to the Virgin Mary as the mother of God, and the song of the Argonauts.

Here is a translation of the introduction written by the poet to the Ode of the Virgin Mary which at the same time exemplifies Sikelianos's approach to his subject:

'The poet having heard on the slopes of Helicon those secret voices of Greece, which focus his soul as clearly to the Universe as the compass points unmistakably from North to South, and while, "a fighter, priest and seer," he is climbing the mountain, he suddenly hears the faint peal of a bell, which calls him—he thinks—to a distant village church to offer his worship to the Mother of Christ.

'So, in this most serene hour, before the single Law of Love, his Creed, manifested on those summits where the mind is frantic with inspiration "complete and initiated"—and Helicon is dressed from head to foot in golden corn—gushes out like a victorious pæan, and the legend of Christ that was lying in the depths of darkness is reborn and is crying out like the young bird that has fallen from its nest.

'And the poet's heart is filled with Pity, Strife's sister. He sets out again to climb steadily the steep path of the divine mountain and bring the reborn legend to the summit.

'And then the poet starts relating the Gospel, which is a part of his work, to the worthy fighters and the chosen few (for Art is not destined for the "learned masses" but for the few and for the Race, for Friendship and for Humanity) depicting as "simple, calm and happy" figures those personages which have been for centuries and will always be the secret mirror of our soul.'

One of the most characteristic poems of his mature years is *Daedalus*, which when published in 1938 was acclaimed by those who had the country's culture at heart as a spiritual event. Sikelianos, in his interpretation of the ancient legend, makes Daedalus the symbol of the creative man, the undaunted and fearless fighter, who perpetually wrestling with his own bold visions, strives to free human

destiny from the bondage of necessity and mould it after the image of the divine. Daedalus personifies the victory of the Will which can give man even wings, not alone to fly, but conquer death and desolation and fecundate the vast celestial spaces. But man will ascend to that supreme goal only through pain. He must sacrifice his earthly possessions, however precious, for the sake of humanity. He must labour and suffer alone, so that he may grasp in the fathomless depths of life the Law which surpasses death by the miracle of man's creative action.

The same spirit pervades the five great poems which Sikelianos published during the first terrible years of occupation. They are called *Akritica*—the songs of the guardians of the frontiers. Never before has his poetry reached such clarity and profundity of vision, such a sincere and deep communion with its subject, as in some of these poems.

The miracle of the Albanian campaign and the fierce, active spirit of resistance which flared up from one end of the country to the other, revealed to him once more the mission of Hellenism. *Καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὄνομα πεποίηκε μηκέτι τοῦ γένους, ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας δοκεῖν εἶναι...*

As long as the awareness of this mission exists in our hearts Greece will never die. She will continue to strive to find and give expression to her own soul, as she has striven ever since the war of liberation, on all the fields of human activities, cultural, political, social, economic, despite the tremendous handicaps and her poor material means. Greece has achieved some things, as she has failed in others. She has performed miracles and has committed blunders and mistakes as is to be expected from a nation engaged in the struggle for existence and does not live passively 'senza infamia e senza lodo.' All her achievements as well as her foibles must be regarded as manifestations of the one motivating desire to find and express her own particular self, that unrepeatable identity, which only if rooted in the national soil and tradition, can grow to a gesture of universal value.

A Renaissance had started in Greece at the beginning of the century, just before the Balkan wars. But it received a heavy blow in 1922, with the defeat of the Greeks in Asia Minor. Despite the chaos that ensued from that catastrophe, the renaissance took a new impetus in the late twenties and the early thirties, and continued even during the occupation. Now we are again at a very crucial moment. The crisis caused by this war will sooner or later subside—but what next? Shall we be able to materialize our renaissance? The vigour, the impulse, all the inward prerequisites are there. But there are also outside factors which we are not masters of. Democracy, freedom, which are indispensable for cultural development, need security and a minimum of prosperity to thrive. Will Greece have these vital means

so that she may be able to fulfil her mission? Or will the voice of a nation be silenced again as it was silenced after the fall of Constantinople in 1453?

## A Lecture on Proust

By DEMETRIOS CAPETANAKIS

*Translated from the French version by John Lehmann\**

THERE are few things as tedious as those lectures or books which have as their title 'The philosophy of such-and-such a poet, or such-and-such a novelist.' In spite of that, in spite of not wishing to be in the least tedious, I want to talk to you this evening about the philosophy of a novelist—about the philosophy of Marcel Proust. The title is not very promising, and I am sure you are expecting something quite shattering; for that reason I hasten to tell you that I shall endeavour to keep as far as possible from everything the title suggests and you anticipate. And I shall do so not only because I do not want to bore you, but chiefly because I believe that what is customarily presented as the philosophy of a poet or a novelist has nothing at all to do with philosophy; for if it had, it would not be tedious. No doubt you think this is only a paradox; but one of the most common misconceptions is the idea people have about the nature of philosophy. They think of it as an abstract and useless science that has nothing to do with life—with *our* life—and that when it enters our experience in the guise of a lecture or a book can only make ordinary healthy-minded people yawn. Almost everybody has this idea about philosophy, even those who are at pains to discover the philosophy of their favourite poet. They read the poet's work, they make a note of the most abstract passages, and then with these passages and using their own thoughts to fill in the gaps they try to construct a system, which they present to us as the philosophy of this author or that author. Of course this construction is as far removed from true philosophy as it is from the author to whom it is attributed: God forbid that I should behave in such a manner to an author of whom I am so fond as Proust. But the better to avoid making such a mistake, I would like to say a few words about what I believe true philosophy to be. I do not believe that philosophy is a science—far less an abstract and useless science that has nothing to do with life, with *our own* life. The study of the works of the great philosophers teaches us the complete contrary; and in order to give you an idea of what these works do teach, in order to show you that philosophy is very far from being something abstract, boring and alien to our life, I shall choose as an example a philosopher who has the

\* This lecture was delivered by the author to a French Society in Cambridge some years before his death and was found among his papers. An earlier and longer version in German has unfortunately disappeared.



reputation of being very abstract, very boring and very dry—I shall choose Aristotle. There is a little phrase of his, hidden away in one of his least-read works, which may help us to understand the true nature of philosophy. 'Being,' says Aristotle, 'is better than not being, it is better to be alive than not to be alive.' Of course it is better to be alive, you will say, than not to be alive ! We need no philosophy to tell us what everyone knows so well. And yet reflect again. Does everyone really know what true life is ? Is it not possible that there are people who might maintain that not being is the only kind of existence that is worth while, and that death is better than life ? Let us take the poets. Take, for instance, Shakespeare. Listen to what Claudio says in *Measure for Measure* :

To sue to live, I find I seek to die ;  
And, seeking death, find life . . .

Remember also the words of Iphigenia in Goethe's play :

A useless life is nothing but a premature death . . .

Even La Fontaine, the La Fontaine who wrote the *Fables* and whose life was so varied and so delightful, even he complained at the end of his career that in spite of his life as a 'butterfly of Parnassus flying from flower to flower and from object to object,' he had not really lived. In spite of the richness of his life, he did not consider it a true life. I could quote many other examples ; but what they all make us feel is that the nature of true life is not as obvious as one might think, and that certain people a little different from the ordinary are aware of this and try at all costs to discover and to realize the kind of life that is worth being lived. These people, a little out of the ordinary, are the true philosophers. They are in search of being, as Aristotle would have said—and it is to this search that Proust devoted his life. His long novel called 'In Search of Lost Time' could very well have been called 'In Search of Being.' In any case even his actual title is sufficient indication that this search for 'lost time' is nothing but the search for real being. We have no need to look for Proust's philosophy in occasional chance reflections, scattered here and there in the text, which it would be extremely difficult to assemble into anything like a system. His thought, not in the least rhapsodical, was the continuous movement of his reason inflamed by his passion for existence. Like nearly all the great philosophers, he was neither dogmatic nor a maker of systems. His mind was always in movement, always searching, always experimenting. To quote Aristotle again : 'Philosophy is forever occupied with a question which has no answer.' The momentary solutions that one finds for a problem have only significance for the moment. The important thing is the *continual movement* ; and it is that which constitutes the philosophic life, and that which Proust makes known to us in the sixteen volumes of his novel. But before considering this work of Proust's, we ought to know something about the life and personality of the author. Behind all philoso-

phies there are living men, whose expression they are. Even the most frigid speculations are the product of a human life, very often the product of an unique suffering. Proust's philosophy makes such a deep impression on us, because it was the expression of a suffering the depth and intensity of which make us shudder.

I do not know if we will ever come to learn the concrete facts of Proust's life which led him to despair. Although his immense novel is nothing but one long confession, we do not know precisely what Proust suffered, nor what people made him suffer, nor whether it was friendship or love—and if love, what kind of love—which brought him the greatest disappointments. He himself said: 'No one wishes to unlock his soul.' And in spite of the revelations which he made about himself, which surpass in audacity and sincerity all previous confessions in history, he managed to conceal from us what he was really like. Henri Massis, whose recent study shed the most revealing light yet on Proust's inner life, goes as far as to assert that the aim of his life, of his art, of his deepest impulse, was to prevent himself 'from being recognized, identified, discovered.' Even his most intimate friends who have published their recollections of him—either because they do not want to say too much or because they do not really know very much—never tell us enough. His letters tell us even less. We know nothing of the love affairs of a man who has spoken to us so much about love.

Marcel Proust was born in Paris in 1871, and was the son of a professor of medicine and of a cultivated Jewess with frail health. His love for his mother was the most important fact in Proust's life. One could plausibly maintain that the final aim of his work was to show the unique importance of the relations between a mother and her son. His health was very delicate, and from earliest childhood he had to give up many things which he loved, the open air, the smell of trees, the scent of flowers which suffocated him. He had an almost pathological sensibility. His ardent imagination, his refined taste, and perhaps a need to forget himself, made him fling himself eagerly into the worldly life of the titled aristocracy, whose names inflamed his imagination, and of cultivated society, whose manners enchanted him so often. That is why we find people asserting that he was the perfect snob. But we should not forget that snobbery is a way, like any other, of forgetting oneself, of assuaging one's suffering. Apparently, during the first years of his worldly life, Proust had some dark disappointments and sufferings. The little volume of stories, poems, dialogues and thoughts which he published in 1891 under the title of *Les Plaisirs et les Jours* reveals this clearly enough. The stories in this volume, in particular, are the confessions of people who have known the darker places of vice, who have felt a horror of them and have suffered the consequences. It seems that Proust plunged ever deeper into the emptiness of worldly life in order

to lose himself and to free himself from the terrible visions which pursued him. And what was worse was that he had to lie to the only person in the world who meant anything to him : to his mother. That mother died, and Proust saw with horror that he had let her go without giving her any of the things she expected from him. Perhaps it was this remorse which made him decide to retire from the world, and create the great work which he could but feel that the dead mother he loved so much still hoped for from him. So it was that he lived during the whole of the last part of his life, an ascetic's life, remote from the world, sleeping during the day-time and working at night, in a room sealed from the noises of the outside world, with Céleste, the faithful servant whom he immortalized in his novel under the name of Françoise. Paul Morand, who was in close contact with him during that time, has written a poem in which he describes Proust and the atmosphere of the room in the house on the Boulevard Haussmann where he lived in creative solitude. That *Ode à Marcel Proust* gives us the most vivid impression of Proust during those days, a creature of the night and solitude, whose despair was only half hidden under the half-ruined mask of a man of the world.

Thus, in that atmosphere of modern asceticism—for Proust was a true ascetic in spite of his experiences of the underworld—in that rather sombre atmosphere, and with an almost incredible concentration of effort, he produced his great work, sixteen volumes which form an indivisible whole. I prefer to call it a 'work' rather than a 'novel,' because it is not a novel in the strict sense of the word, nor simply an autobiography, and one certainly cannot call it a book of science or pure philosophy. Works which express the whole personality of an author cannot be exactly classified. That is why we can examine Proust's work from the most different points of view. We can talk of Proust's psychology, Proust's sociology, Proust's æsthetic, or, as I am doing at the moment, of Proust's philosophy. And I believe we certainly have the right to talk of philosophy in connection with Proust. It is not because I am particularly interested in philosophy that I have discovered it in Proust's work. No ; as I said earlier on, even the title of his book is evidence of preoccupations which Aristotle could only have described as philosophic. There is a certain passage where Proust has described the way in which he composed his book, and which ends with an incontestable avowal of his philosophical passion. I think if I read you that passage it will be the best way of passing from the biographical part of this lecture to the part devoted to his ideas. Any writer worthy of the name (says Proust) must shut himself up in a kind of darkness, because all great works are the children of darkness and silence, he must shut himself up for years together and prepare his book with the most minute care, 'with continual regroupings of his forces as if for an offensive, endure it as if it were a duty imposed upon

him, accept it as a rule of life, build it like a church, follow it like a prescribed régime, overcome it like an obstacle, win it like a friendship, feed it like an infant and create it as if it were a world, mindful of those mysteries the explanations of which are probably only to be found in other worlds, the intimations of which move us more than anything else in life and in art.\*

Those mysteries, which Proust mentions in this memorable passage, are nothing but the problems which create a philosopher. They have no answer—they can perhaps be explained in other worlds—but when they present themselves to us they are so overwhelming that the only point of our lives can be to find a solution. And when we think like that, we are in fact coming back to what Aristotle said about philosophy, that it is for ever occupied with a problem which has no solution. This problem presents itself to us under many guises. Each of us has his own special way of seeing it and experiencing it. And that is why it is so interesting to be acquainted with all the different philosophies, or rather with the thought of all the different philosophers. Each philosopher has his own individual way of experiencing the problem, which is different from everybody else's way. The influences which come from outside are in most cases only superficial, limited to language and form. There has been too much talk of the influence of Bergson and Ruskin on Proust. My own belief is that Proust changed what he took from them to such an extent that there is not much point in stressing their influence. One thing, however, which has been absolutely ignored, is the resemblance of Proust's philosophy to that of an English poet—to Wordsworth's philosophy. The central experience in the famous 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' is one of the principal motifs of Proust's work. In that famous poem Wordsworth tells us that during his childhood—

meadow, grove and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight  
To me did seem  
Apparell'd in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

But he then goes on to tell us that the 'visionary gleam' has fled and the dream has faded away—

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.  
In spite of this, he tells us that these recollections of childhood are a 'perpetual benediction' and the 'fountain-light' of all his days, which—

Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal silence : truths that wake  
To perish never . . .

\*Time Regained.

The things of the external world are, for the child, symbols of a truth which is not to be understood, but only felt. The grown man can no longer see such symbolism in the world around him, and it is for that reason that he must call on his memory to re-create what he saw during his childhood, and to feel once more the depth beneath the appearance of things.

One must admit that such an experience is by no means common to everyone. There are some writers who cannot bear the memory of their childhood, who hate their childhood : André Gide, for instance, or Thomas Gray. There are, however, others—such as Wordsworth, Vaughan, Hoelderlin and Proust—who find the most solid reality in their childhood, because it speaks to them of the mystery of another world. In order to re-create his childhood—or rather the sense of intimacy with the mystery of the world which his childhood gave him—Wordsworth wrote his *Prelude*. For the same reason Proust wrote his great novel. His years of childhood were for him, in his own phrase, ‘*Les terrains résistants sur lesquels il s’appuyait*,’ and that because in those recollections of childhood he saw the true symbols of the mystery of existence. But how was he to recover their special quality? Ordinary memory cannot re-create the symbolic nature of things. Luckily, according to him, there is a kind of involuntary memory which, with the aid of the things themselves, can recover contact with their symbolism. ‘I feel there is much to be said,’ he wrote, ‘for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and so effectively lost to us until the day, which to many never comes, when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognized their voice the spell is broken, we have delivered them ; they have overcome death and return to share our life. And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it, all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of the intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us), which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die.’ \*

It was on just such an object, and its miraculous power, that Proust built up the whole edifice of his novel. That object was a little cake called ‘madeleine’ which his mother gave him one day with his tea. In the taste and smell of the ‘madeleine’ Proust recovered his lost childhood. While he was still a child his aunt gave him the same cake when he went to see her in her room. And now, ‘just

\* *Swann's Way*. Translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff.

as the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little crumbs of paper, which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch themselves and bend, take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, permanent and recognizable, so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and of its surroundings taking their proper shape and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.\* That evocation of the past, or rather that resurrection of the past by means which are not intellectual but almost magical, is the principal aim of 'A la Recherche du Temps Perdu.' The philosophic significance of such a resurrection is clear, because it is the resurrection of the symbols of a truth which affects us without our being able to define it. But it is not only the living recollections of our childhood which have this particular quality. We are always meeting people and things which disturb us in the same way when they present themselves to us as individual realities. One of the greatest enigmas which tortured Proust, which made up the joy and agony of his life, was the enigma of the *individual*.

Proust believed that everything in life which is general—a general idea, one person like another, for instance—is of far less importance than the individual, than what is unique in the world, what cannot be replaced or represented by anything else. He believed that pessimists are only pessimists because they see happiness as something generalized. But happiness is never generalized. Happiness always comes in some unique shape, it is always new, always unexpected. We can never tell in advance what will make us happy. That is the reason why those who believe in what is unique, individual and unexpected believe also in happiness. Apart from what is individual, everything is empty, denuded of interest and desperately boring. One might perhaps maintain that such thoughts are nothing but the ideas of an æsthetic. But with Proust individuality is not merely something æsthetic: it is the very essence of things. It is the force which, in love, causes our peculiar emotion about the beloved. Nor is it the perquisite of people alone. Even inanimate objects can, by the force of their individuality, become unique and irreplaceable for us. According to Proust, there is a feeling which turns things from a mere spectacle to beings *without any equivalent*. Even landscapes (he says) have a certain quality of individual life. Even a room has its individual charm. The belief that certain things have an individuality of their own can give to those things a soul which they keep, and which grows in us. The *name* of a thing is generally the beginning of such a

\* *Swann's Way*. Translation by C. K. Scott Moncrieff.

development of individuality. When he was young, Proust tells us, 'I did not think of towns, landscapes, historic monuments as more or less agreeable scenes, cut out here and there from the same material, but I thought of each one as an unknown being, essentially different from all the rest, which my soul craved to know, and would have much profit from knowing. And how much more individual they became when they had names, names which only existed for them, like the names of people. Names give us an image of people—and of towns which they accustom us to think of as individual, as unique as people—a confused image which draws from them, from the brilliant or sombre quality of their sound, the colour with which it is uniformly painted, like one of those posters, completely blue or completely red, in which, owing to the limitations of the process employed or a whim of the artist, not only the sky and the sea are blue or red, but also the boats, the church, the passers-by. The name of Parma, one of the towns I most wanted to visit since I had read *La Chartreuse de Parme*, seemed to me compact, glossy, mauve and tender; if anyone talked to me of some house in Parma where I should be received, the pleasure it gave me was to think that I should live in a glossy, compact, mauve and tender house which had no connection with the houses in any other town of Italy, because my imagination pictured it with the aid of that heavy syllable of the name of Parma where no air circulated, and of all I had made it absorb of Stendhalian sweetness and the reflected gleam of violets. And when I thought of Florence, the image that sprang up before me was of a town miraculously embalmed and like the corolla of a flower, because it was called the city of lilies and its cathedral Sainte-Marie-des-Fleurs.\*' Proust found it impossible to choose between those two towns, both of which had for him so incomparable an individuality. Neither could ever replace the other for him. But generally the names of people and of things are too narrow. They make the things they stand for seem too simple. One nearly always fills the name of something unknown with fancies, dreams. And this dream-content rouses in us the desire to know the thing or the person more intimately. And that is very important, because Proust tells us that without such a desire we can never know anything. If one desires something one wants to possess it, and knowing it is a way of possessing it. But the individual personality of another person is not something one can possess, it is not something that one can know. Individuality is something irrational, something our reason cannot grasp. We can only desire it, move in its orbit, struggle, sacrifice ourselves, even die for it. This struggle for what is individual reaches its purest and clearest expression in love. What makes the person we love so mysterious, so desperately desirable for us is his or her individuality. When we find

\* *Swann's Way*.

in someone only general concepts, we cannot love that person. Love begins when we begin to see in another person something individual, something unique and without any equivalent. Then it is that every movement of that person, even the most trivial, and every gesture appears to have an importance, a significance that is terrible in our eyes. We suddenly have a strange new awareness. The existence of the person we love in the world we generally find so boring gives it a miraculous beauty. We watch the rising of the sun of one of our beloved's glances as if it were some wonderful spectacle, and we examine the growth of a smile as if it were a phenomenon of nature. But love is by no means satisfied with such wonder and admiration alone. According to Proust, love is the insensate and intolerable desire to possess the beloved. Not merely physically: physical possession is not really possession at all, said Proust. One wants to possess the whole being of the beloved. It is an old truth, and we find it in Plato's *Symposium*, in the speech of Aristophanes when he says that 'what the lover wants of the person he loves is something indefinable, that one can feel but not express.' Proust, like a philosopher who wants to express the inexpressible and find the unfindable, cannot be satisfied with such a statement. He wants to find the meaning of love at all costs. He cannot rest content with the usual solution which is given to the problem of love. He refuses to be deceived, even by himself. He will have nothing to do with the idea that procreation is the real point of love. To look for its true meaning he had the courage to leave the regular paths of love to descend into the accursed towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is not the time or place to follow Proust in that terrible descent which is one of the most overwhelming things in literature since the descent of Dante into Hell. What we know is that Proust has depicted the suffering and sterility of love in a quite terrifying way. And what is worse, is that in spite of all that he dared to risk, when he asks himself: What is it that binds us to the person we love? What is it in love that we must possess or die?—he finds no answer. But Proust cannot endure that. To escape that suffering, that philosophic anxiety that is always looking for something it cannot find, there is only one way: to lose oneself in the general, to forget oneself in objectivity and the calm of natural laws. It is in this mood that he formulates those general laws of love, and tells us that suffering is the universal and inevitable fate of lovers. He tells us that love is a kind of madness, and he never tires of repeating it. He even reaches the point of denying his deepest belief, in saying that individuality—which, as we have seen, has a far greater reality and importance for him than anything else—is nothing but an illusion. 'What we call individual,' he says, 'is merely something general.' It is with such remarks, general, objective and detached, that Proust seeks to



escape from his anguish, from his intolerable suffering. And he did it deliberately, as an ailing doctor gives himself a drug. It is he who said that 'life, love and suffering lead us to dead ends.' But those walls that life puts up across our path can be pierced by the intellect. The intellect does not recognize any closed situations in life, from which there is no issue. With the intellect one can dissolve the person one loves into a vaster reality—so vast that one might be able to forget that person. One might be cured of the suffering of love, if one pretended to oneself that it was a kind of illness, an illness, for instance, of the heart.

There are moments in Proust's work when the need to find a solution in philosophy of the most urgent problems of existence is so painful that we begin to feel that we cannot go on, that we must put the book down. We summon our intelligence to our aid, to give us a moment of rest, of respite ; but only a moment ; because philosophic anxiety can never cease, can never allow us to stop for good. Proust's affirmation, for instance, that love is only a kind of madness and the individuality of the person we love an illusion, has nothing definitive about it. We turn the page, and we find Proust fighting with all his strength to find another solution to this problem that in reality has no solution. He has changed his point of view. He tries to avoid ever being the same. It is the surest way to avoid the danger of dogmatism. The only thing we find is constant with him is anxiety—always bound up with the preoccupation caused by the problem of time. The abstract problem of time—what time is apart from our individual life and our suffering—is not so overwhelming as the problem of the relation of our own life to time. We might say that time is ourselves. Our 'I' is not something static, inflexible, always the same. Our 'I' is a movement in time, that is a perpetual process of change. But normally we are not aware of our movement in time. We consider ourselves as something fixed. The greatest tragedy in life, says Proust, is that our heart changes. But we only know it through our imagination and through novels. We know perfectly well the theory that the earth revolves, but in reality we take no account of it. We walk on something which appears motionless, and we live in peace. It is the same with time. It is for that reason that novelists, to make us really feel the passage of time, accelerate the speed of events in a quite frightening way, and in two minutes hurry us through ten, twenty, thirty years. It was through novels that Proust had his first revelation of the fact that he was not situated *outside* time but *in* time, and there was nothing he could do about it. That first revelation, so full of sorrow, is presented to us in his novel in a most remarkable way. One of the chief aims of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is to make us feel time as something living, inseparable from our own existence. When we come to the end of the sixteenth

volume, to the end of the novel, the new idea of time we have acquired makes us feel giddy. Proust gives us a new awareness of ourselves, the awareness of our existence in a fourth dimension, the dimension of time. This new awareness is certainly dangerous. When one feels oneself so bound up with time, when one feels oneself so completely its prisoner—then despair is not far away. Proust's novel would indeed be a work of absolute despair, if one did not find in it the great belief which was Proust's sole support: the belief in art. He believed that art could liberate man from the prison of time. His reasons for that belief are of no great interest. They were invented by faith. But could one say that Proust found a definitive solution to the problem of life—the solution of art? No, I believe that, in spite of that faith, Proust never ceased to ask himself the philosophic question, the question that has no answer. It was in one of his moments of most complete sincerity that Proust wrote that 'art can show us what riches, what enormous variety is hidden in the night of our souls—the night of our souls which we call nothingness.' It was in another such moment that he asked himself whether nothingness is not indeed the truth and all our dream nothing but a lie.

Nothingness—everything—called God by believers—are the two names which philosophers give to the darkness which surrounds our existence. The true philosophers are those who can make us feel this thing that some call God, and others nothingness. And that is why we find in Proust a true philosopher. He is always talking to us of nothingness, of the darkness of our soul and the night which extends beyond our lives: the night which those who believe call God.

## The Hidden Force

By WILLIAM PLOMER

SOON after the last war a number of novels by the Dutchman, Louis Couperus (1863-1923), appeared in English translations and found many readers. The best known of them was *Old People and the Things that Pass*; the most striking, perhaps, was *The Hidden Force*, of which the English translation, by Teixeira de Mattos, was published by Jonathan Cape in 1922. But Couperus had appeared in English long before—in 1891, in fact, when his second novel came out in Heinemann's International Library under the editorship of the ever enterprising Edmund Gosse. Its original title is *Noodlot*; in English it was given a rather silly title—*Footsteps of Fate*. Gosse provided an introduction, headed 'The Dutch Sensitivists,' from which it appears that sensitivism was an attempt, under French influence, to refine the crudities of realism. In Gosse's *Silhouettes* there is a gossipy sketch,

written many years later, of Couperus, whom he calls, I think, the representative Dutch novelist.

'The full moon wore the hue of tragedy that evening.' Such is the opening sentence of *The Hidden Force*, and although it is not the sort of sentence we should be likely to find at the beginning of a novel nowadays, it does very well: it at once makes the reader comfortably expectant of troubles which he is going to enjoy vicariously. This tragic moon illuminates a languorous evening in Labuwangi, a town in Java, and the air is full of 'an oppressive mystery': indeed the atmosphere is quite as oppressive and mysterious as any in Conrad, but it is evoked by a plainer and perhaps more detailed, if not more exact, observation. Van Oudijck, the Resident, is stalking past the villas of the more important townsfolk—'faintly lighted, deathly silent, apparently uninhabited, with their rows of whitewashed flower-pots gleaming in the vague dusk of the evening.' He is a tall, sturdy man, 'practical, cool-headed, quick in decision from the long habit of authority,' and not allowing enough for the imponderables in the native character. It is not his nature, we are told, to yield to mystery; he denies it. But we are assured that the mystery is there: the novelist's task is to convince us of it.

The Resident is 48, and divorced from his first wife, a good-looking half-caste, by whom he has had a son, Theo, now 23, and a daughter, Doddie, only 17 but a little ripe for her age. The second Mrs. van Oudijck, Léonie by name, is barely 30. She has 'the languid dignity of women born in Java, daughters of European parents,' has immense charm, and is a lazy, shallow sensualist; her pet author is Catulle Mendès. One of her main preoccupations is clandestine sexual intercourse with Theo, her stepson. Although, because of her charm, she is not entirely worthless as a proconsul's wife, she is quite unworthy of the honest van Oudijck, whose heart, if it were not so much in his work, would feel even more strongly its isolation. This lonely, capable man, blinded by dutifulness and by want of imagination to much of what is going on round him, engages the reader's sympathies and wins his admiration—unless the reader is one who finds a cuckold, as such, a joke.

So the centre of the scene is set. Tragedy, we know from the first, impends: we do not yet guess its nature. 'Mystery,' a brooding melancholy, a vague threat, a 'hidden force,' is, we are told, in the air, is behind the faces and beneath the surface of people and things: we wait, a little impatiently, for more precision; we are not willing to have our blood curdled by mere statements, or even by the gradual and skilful evocation of Dutch society in an admittedly somehow ominous tropical setting. We are certainly far from any breezy British convention of colonial life, with its hard-riding, straight-shooting, boyish man, a pipe between his teeth, and his 'little woman'

ordering an early tiffin so that they can be in time for the gymkhana. . . . No, the Labuwangi whites are of a different order. Eldersma, for instance, the district secretary, has, according to his wife Eva, ceased to be a man : ' My husband is an official.' Eva herself is a cultivated woman, ' very European,' from an artistic environment at the Haguc, where her father is a painter, her mother a singer. Here at Labuwangi she suffers the isolation of a cultivated person among the uncultivated, but she has character, she has guts as well as sensibility, and adapts herself to her surroundings ; and the locals are grateful to her for her gaiety, which they lack, and forgive her for everything they do not understand—her æsthetic principles, her liking for Wagner, the arty daddoes in her drawing-room—and to Eva the lazy Léonie delegates nearly all the social duties of a Resident's wife. Then there was van Helderer, the controller, and his wife. Apparently quite European, tall, fair and blue-eyed, van Helderer has been born and bred in Java and has never been out of it, yet there is something ultra-European in his manners and tastes. His wife Ida is the type of the white-skinned half-caste :

She was full of little mysterious fads and hatreds and affections ; all her actions were the result of mysterious little impulses. . . . She was absolutely unreliable. . . . She was always in love, tragically.

Such are some of the circle.

It is at a reception at Eva's that we see where trouble is brewing. Van Oudijck is worried because his relations with the native Regent, or rajah, are not easier and more agreeable. His relations with the Regent's late father—a noble, cultivated descendant of one of the oldest Javanese families—had been perfect : they had been almost fraternal. But the son, Sunario, the present Regent, van Oudijck is unable to fathom. Sunario is stiff, aloof, enigmatic, wholly absorbed in all sorts of superstitious observances and fanatical speculations, with a reputation among the populace for sacrosanctity : van Oudijck thinks him unpractical, a degenerate and crazy Javanese dandy. At the party, where Sunario and his young wife make a formal appearance, van Oudijck takes him aside to talk about Sunario's brother, the Regent of Ngadjiwa, who is gambling and drinking, bringing his family name into disrepute, and by misrule discrediting the Government. Unless the brother reforms, van Oudijck explains with tact, he will have to be dismissed, which would bring disgrace upon the family. Outwardly agreeing, Sunario boils with anger and hatred because this ' low-born Hollander and infidel ' dares to criticize the supremely sacred aristocracy to which he belongs. Later, when Eva's circle indulge in table-turning, the table hints at rebellion and danger, and taps out obscenities involving the name of Léonie van Oudijck. Everybody is made uneasy. Ida

thinks she sees a hadji, in white, leaving the garden in the moonlight. . . .

The depravity of Léonie and the tension between the Resident and the Regent grow simultaneously. Léonic, Theo and Doddie go off to stay at Patjaram, which belongs to the de Lucés, a half-Eurasian, half-native princely family who have made a fortune out of sugar. Couperus gives a most wonderful account of life at Patjaram, elaborate, leisurely and corrupt, and of Addic de Luce, a son of the house, whose physical beauty he conveys with a disturbing fervour. This seductive animal, with whom Doddie has long been infatuated, is seduced by Léonie under the very noses of her stepdaughter and stepson, Theo, who is also her lover ; and she rejoices at her power over both men and at being the rival of a stepdaughter many years younger than herself.

During this sultry, lusciously sensual interlude the storm comes to a head at Ngadjiwa, where, after the erring Regent has publicly disgraced himself, van Oudijck decides to dismiss him. There is a tremendous scene when the mother of the two Regents comes to plead with van Oudijck against his decision. The old princess ends by humiliating herself as greatly as she can imagine : rending her garments and screaming for mercy towards her son, she places the Resident's foot on her neck. But he will not give in. Later there is a patched-up reconciliation, but while van Oudijck is busy congratulating himself on his tact, diplomacy and knowledge of the Javanese, he fails to allow for the hidden force, for 'the hatred which would possess a power of impenetrable mystery, against which he, the European, was unarmed.'

Gradually Sunario avenges the slight upon his house, calling into being the occult powers of which he is master. There are manifestations of what may be supernatural or may be magic forces, and it is on the Residency and its occupants that they are brought to bear—with terrifying effect. They take chiefly the form of inexplicable pollutions. One night Léonie, stepping out of her bath, suddenly finds her naked body being pelted with gobbets of 'something slimy, like clotted blood,' apparently betel-stained spittle, discharged at her she knows not whence, and she is driven almost out of her mind. The Resident finds his bed befouled ; he lifts a tumbler to drink, and it falls to pieces, or a drink suddenly grows cloudy between the moment of pouring out and the moment of drinking ; he hears a persistent, unaccountable hammering overhead. After these happenings have reached a climax, van Oudijck sees Sunario and wins a moral victory over him—or seems to do so, for a very slight gleam of irony is to be seen in Sunario's eyes.

At least the horrors are called off, but the family life of the van Oudijcks has been wrecked by hatreds and jealousies, and the morale

of the Resident himself has been broken by the war of nerves, by the hidden force, by 'things stronger than the human will and intellect.' Léonie goes to Europe to tart it in Paris; the Resident abandons his career, which was about to lead to higher things; and the book ends with a visit paid by Eva to van Oudijck living in retirement with a native mistress. At the very end there is a glimpse of that recurrent hadji, grinning at the man who, though he had lived his life in Java, had been weaker than 'That' . . .

Such, briefly, and of necessity crudely and sketchily, is the outline of this extraordinary novel. It raises many questions in the mind. The first is why, since it is so dramatic and exotic, it has never been made into a play or film. Ignorance, perhaps. At present it may be too soon or too late to act it, for it raises political matters vast in their implications; and to stress, at this point in history, the differences rather than the similarities between Europeans and Asiatics, or to spread doubts about the part played by Europe in ruling Asia, would be to play into the hands of the Japanese.

Did Couperus intend his novel as a thorough indictment of Dutch rule in Java? I think not, but it would not be surprising to learn that when *The Hidden Force* first appeared in Holland he was accused of such an intention. He does, it must be admitted, put into the mouth of van Helderer some damaging phrases:

. . . a gigantic but exhausted colony, still governed from Holland with one idea: the pursuit of gain . . . a petty, mean-souled blood-sucker; the country sucked dry; and the real population . . . oppressed by the disdain of its overlord.

Van Helderer was addressing Eva:

You, as an artist, feel the danger approaching, vaguely, like a cloud in the sky, in the Indian night; I see the danger as something very real, something rising . . . if not from America and Japan, then out of the soil of India [i.e. the Indies] herself . . .

The truth is that Couperus was touching on something much greater than the life of a Dutch ruling family in Java, with erotic and supernatural variations—and he knew it. But he was out to write a novel, not a political prophesy: he tells his story, he throws out his hints and ideas, and leaves the reader to do the rest. But there is a key passage where he speaks directly enough:

. . . Java! Outwardly the docile colony with the subject race, which was no match for the rude trader who, in the golden age of his republic, with the young strength of a youthful people, greedy and eager for gain, stout and phlegmatic, planted his foot and his flag on the crumbling empires, on the thrones which tottered as though the earth had been in seismic labour. But, deep in its soul, it was never subjected, though smiling in proud, contemptuous resignation and bowing submissively beneath its

fate ; deep in its soul, despite a cringing reverence, it lived in freedom its own mysterious life, hidden from western eyes, however these might seek to fathom the secret—as though with a philosophic intention of maintaining before all a proud and smiling tranquillity, pliantly yielding and to all appearances courtously approaching—but deep within itself divinely certain of its own views and so far removed from all its rulers' ideals of civilization that no fraternization between master and servant will ever take place, because the difference which ferments in soul and blood remains insuperable. And the European, proud in his might, in his strength, in his civilization and his humanity, rules arrogantly, blindly, selfishly, egoistically, amidst all the intricate cog-wheels of his authority, which he slips into gear with the certainty of clockwork, controlling its every movement, till to the foreigner, the outside observer, this overlordship of tangible things, this colonizing of territory alien in race and mind, appears a masterpiece, a very world created.

But beneath all this show the hidden force lurks, slumbering now and unwilling to fight. . . . As for the native, he reads his overlord with a single penetrating glance ; he sees in him the illusion of civilization and humanity and he knows that they are non-existent. While he gives him the title of lord and the homage due to the master, he is profoundly conscious of his democratic, commercial nature and despises him for it in silence and judges him with a smile which his brother understands ; and he too smiles. . . . What is will not always be. . . . Dumbly he hopes that God will lift up those who are oppressed. . . . Never is there the harmony that understands ; never does that love blossom forth which is conscious of unity ; and between the two there is always the gap. . . .

I suppose it might be objected that Couperus is a little too fond of the word 'mystery' ; and that he takes too romantic, too extreme a view of the incompatibility of the natives of the East Indies and their white rulers ; and that he comes perilously near the claptrap about East being East and West being West and the twain never meeting. The answer to that claptrap is that they'd better meet, and until they do there'll be trouble ; and that they must meet on the ground of their affinities, their common human nature, which is far more important in the long run than their differences. Couperus perceived the differences imaginatively and poetically (like Forster in *A Passage to India*) rather than politically ; and it is well to remember that he was writing of a life now nearly half-a-century distant. (An English novel about India in 1900 could hardly have allowed for half of what has happened, internally and externally, since then.) Van Helderén's hints about something rising, 'if not from America and Japan, then out of the soil of India herself,' were pregnant. Much has risen. Since 1900, Labuwangi has been through a political, economic and

technical revolution ; America and Japan have had much to do with its ideas and habits, and it may have formed ideas of its own. There have been two world-wars since the period of *The Hidden Force*. The internal combustion engine whizzes in all directions, on land and sea and in the air, with its enormous thirst for petrol, its speed and lethal power. Propaganda has obtained the use of the wireless and the films, and has become a great part of the art of government. Above all, the Japanese, after intrigues, infiltrations and commercial successes, burst out and seized a great part of Asia, since when they have been spreading their twaddle about 'Greater East Asia' and 'co-prosperity.' Having had a taste of Japanese rule, Labuwangi ought now to be ready to welcome back the Dutch, the whites, almost as brothers.

'No fraternization between master and servant will ever take place,' wrote Couperus : but what if the relationship were to become something other than that between master and servant ? I think if Couperus were alive to-day he would have seen that if the West's present task of 'liberating' many millions in the East is to succeed, it cannot be merely commercial. His 'message' appears to be that exploitation is bound to fail in the long run, and that a cheap, 'democratic' complacency on the part of the practical, pushing Westerner must also fail if he does not allow for what is beneath the surface. A man, a thoroughly just and estimable man, like van Oudijck denies the alien, the unconscious, the uncomfortable, and in the end they break him.

*The Hidden Force* is valuable for the questions it raises, for its prophetic hints and poetic insight, but primarily it is valuable, and deserves a more recognized place, in that not large class of novels dealing with the momentous impact of Europe and Asia on one another. Its merits purely as a novel are quite out of the ordinary ; nor is it the only impressive novel by its author.

## The Pre-Raphaelite Literary Painters

By STEPHEN SPENDER

THE greatest artistic movement in England during the nineteenth century was Pre-Raphaelitism. William Gaunt in his two volumes, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* and *The Aesthetic Adventure*, shows how Pre-Raphaelitism was the source of the art joined with socialism of William Morris and of the æsthetic movement. The painting of Burne-Jones, and a good deal else associated in the public mind with Pre-Raphaelitism, he shows to have been really a corruption of the original impulse which, indeed, seemed doomed to be corrupted.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Pre-Raphaelitism was that



it was an insular movement of English artists, who, although they claimed to go back to the painters before Raphael, eschewed the continent, particularly the influence of France. This insularity and a sense of self-sufficiency survived when all the other Pre-Raphaelite principles ceased to be observed.

Anyone who has read Holman Hunt's *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (which made an unforgettable impression on me when I was fourteen) will realize that Pre-Raphaelitism is a misnomer as far as the pictures painted by the Pre-Raphaelites are concerned. The Pre-Raphaelites knew almost nothing of the painters before Raphael, but they held certain principles which they were supposed to apply to the painting of pictures. Most of these principles were attempts to reduce the truthful painting of nature to a set of rules; they lacked the new vision of nature which gave such energy to the French Impressionists. Holman Hunt's famous excursion in search of natural truth and biblical atmosphere, to paint a goat, supposedly the Scapegoat, by the shore of the Dead Sea, was the *reductio ad absurdum* of Pre-Raphaelite theories. Nothing could have had less in common, by the way, with the spirit of the Italian primitives, who would have painted the goat in their backyard, and made the onlooker see that it was inevitably the Scapegoat. Of the search after fidelity to nature, William Gaunt writes: 'There could be no such thing as absolute truth to nature . . . They had embarked on a search for something that did not exist. They were quite ignorant of the fourteenth century, which was to be their starting point.'

It is true that the search after absolute truth to nature is an empty one in art, for the plain reason that nature's aspects are infinite and no artist can depict infinite-sidedness. All he can be true to is a certain insight into nature, like that which filled the mind of Wordsworth when he was a boy. It is true also that the Pre-Raphaelites were ignorant of the painters before Raphael. However, to say that they were 'quite ignorant of the fourteenth century' is to forget that Rossetti knew Dante and translated the *Vita Nuova*. What, though, does Mr. Gaunt think the Pre-Raphaelites did stand for? Here is his answer:

. . . The starting-point was something which never had existed; but this tissue of absurdity began to palpitate like a grain of chemical substance, defying analysis, with its inward energy, becoming more instead of less intense. Pre-Raphaelitism was a misunderstanding they all misunderstood. It was a reform and a dream. It was real and unreal. It was modern, it was in the Middle Ages. It was a reasonable conclusion on fanciful premises, a fantasy resulting from a practical proposal. It was an escape from the age and a means of converting it. It was a circle in which the future and the past chased each other round. It was a dimension in which people and things were

actual and yet phantom. It was to die and be born again, to shoot an uncanny ray through the material opacity of the times, to sparkle like radium in the leaden tube of Victoria's reign : through literature, art, religion, politics, even tables and chairs.

A good deal of careful consideration has gone into this passage, which is rather badly written. It glamorizes its theme too much, and the attempt to introduce analogies from science about substances which defy analysis and radium sparkling through lead is not helpful. Of course, there is something quintessential in every artistic achievement which defies analysis. After we have related Pope or Keats or Wordsworth to his age, studied his music and imagery, explained how the texture of his mind and senses is woven into his language, there remains something, that is to say, the poetry itself, which 'defies analysis' in *The Rape of the Lock*, *The Ode to A Nightingale*, or the *Lines Written near Tintern Abbey*. All our criticism can do is to isolate that which 'defies analysis' and relate it to its time and place, and to our time and place also.

Questions which have puzzled many people about the Pre-Raphaelites all have this aim of isolating from the propaganda of the movement and its supporters and opponents, from the behaviour and history of personalities, the right real thing, the essential Pre-Raphaelite achievement, and attempting to estimate its significance. What was the true aim of Pre-Raphaelitism? Is the supposed Pre-Raphaelite quality in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite artists an æsthetically distinguishing feature, or is it superficial and almost irrelevant? If there are such things as specifically Pre-Raphaelite works of art, how do they compare with works produced by other artists belonging to other movements? Do we accept the definition of Pre-Raphaelitism invented by the Pre-Raphaelites, or shall we discover that really the movement was united by some common factor or factors quite other than their declared aims?

Mr. Gaunt's book contains most of the material required for answering these and other questions, though one may turn also to Ruskin and to Holman Hunt, to Evelyn Waugh's brilliant biography of Rossetti, and, for a later period, to James Laver on Whistler.

Mr. Gaunt, in a passage immediately before the one just quoted, writes :

The group had acted as the medium for the Romantic spirit of the century whose essence was a love of the past and of unsophisticated nature. It was linked with Romantic Poetry, with the Gothic and religious Revival, with the reaction against the Industrial Revolution ; with Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, Pugin and Pusey, the anti-Victorian thinkers Ruskin and Carlyle, though with the Italian masters of the later Middle Age, who provided its curious name, it had very little to do. It had also the realist, reforming spirit of 1848.

This suggests, what is surely true, that the inspiration of Pre-Raphaelitism was verbal, literary, poetic, rather than of painting. The influence which the Pre-Raphaelites shared far more than their pedantic formulæ for the technique of painting were Keats's *Isabella* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Keats, Shakespeare, the Bible, Dante, suggested to them the subjects and scenery of their pictures. The truest experience which they shared was literary, and Millais betrayed the Pre-Raphaelites not when he abandoned their rules for imitating nature, but when he lost touch with the Pre-Raphaelite communication with the spirit of Romantic poetry and produced paintings which were as badly poetic as *The North-West Passage* and *Bubbles*.

It is understandable, therefore, that Pre-Raphaelitism went out of fashion at a time when painters and critics demanded an unmitigated painter's vision in painting; and that it has become rather fashionable again now that literature has crept back into painting by the back door of Surrealism.

If one were to ask what is the supreme example of Pre-Raphaelite achievement, the answer would surely be some such poem as Tennyson's *Mariana*, with pictures such as this:

About a stone-cast from the wall  
A sluice with blackened waters slept,  
And o'er it many, round and small,  
The clustered marish-mosses crept.  
Hard by a poplar shook alway,  
All silver-green with gnarled bark  
For leagues no other tree did mark  
The level waste, the rounding gray . . .

Nothing could be more perfect here than the creation of detail which stimulates the inward eye of the reader as with a muscular movement. Again, in the *Lady of Shalott*:

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,  
Little breezes dusk and shiver . . .

The reader creates a picture of this out of his own store of memories of things half seen which he is now stimulated to see as though for the first time. Yet it is literary observation, too sharply emphasized on one detail of expression for painting, for the painter's skill unlike the poet's lies in suggesting detail by giving the whole landscape, instead of suggesting a landscape by evoking one detail. There is a difference of emphasis between the poetic effect and the effect in painting. Poetry must be sharp and particular exactly in the situation where painting must be vague. What could be more perfect in poetry than Shakespeare's famous 'the swallow dares.' The force of this is that it gives us a thrilling sensation of the word 'dare.' True, the swallow does 'dare' to come at the approach of summer, but how passionate, tender, warm, are the feelings which crystallize around this word 'dare,' which seems keen

and sensitive as though balanced on a razor edge of meaning when used in conjunction with the swallow, soaring in a heaven of our minds, as it seems.

Yet imagine painting the audacious swallow, and one envisages at once the difference between the poet's and the painter's visual imagination. Detail in poetry is an illusion of particularity, it is a generalized conception imprisoned within narrow limits of sensation. The aspens that quiver and the little breezes that dusk and shiver are aspens and breezes that the reader thinks for himself, though sharpened and shaded by Tennyson to the pitch of poignancy. Paint them and they become what the artist sets before the onlooker's eyes. The imitation of poetry is that the poet can, in fact, never make the reader see exactly what he sees in his own mind; he can only stimulate him to focus the same sensations around an object which is really an invisible  $x$  in a kind of equation of qualifying experience. It is the sensation of *quivering* and *dusking* and *shivering* that sets up a shudder of comprehension in the reader's whole being as it focuses upon an object which it projects.

Thus, the attempt to paint poetry according to the Pre-Raphaelite formula of truth makes the mistake of *copying* poetry in painting. To-day the Victorian criticisms of the Pre-Raphaelites amaze us. They are nearly all devoted to attacking the distorted faces and bodies of the figures in Pre-Raphaelite paintings. The most famous of all these attacks is Dickens's in *Household Words* on Millais's *Carpenter's Shop*. He describes the figure of the Virgin Mother as

a kneeling woman so horrible in her ugliness that (supposing it were possible for any human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster in the vilest cabaret in France or the lowest gin-shop in England.

The extravagance of this and other attacks should not blind us to the fact that there is a certain truth in them which we ignore, because we have long grown accustomed to discount the expressions of the Pre-Raphaelite figures which are usually irrelevant or disconcerting, so that we look to Pre-Raphaelite pictures for other qualities. Yet the Victorian attacks point to a very fundamental criticism of Pre-Raphaelite painting. This is, that the Pre-Raphaelite 'truth to nature,' that is to say, photographic exactitude, fails when it attempts to illustrate poetic truth and produces effects of ugliness, absurdity and inane irrelevance in the paintings which followed strictly the Pre-Raphaelite formulæ. There is a youthfulness and sincerity about Millais's early work (Millais was obviously a very nice person) which puts his later painting in the shade: yet *The Carpenter's Shop* is on the wrong tack because it fails to create visual symbols: instead it introduces truth on two contradictory levels, poetic atmosphere and an

attempt to create photographic likenesses of the Virgin Mother, Joseph and Our Lord. Poetic truth and photography are at war in it as in so many Pre-Raphaelite paintings. The Pre-Raphaelite formula for painting *The Carpenter's Shop* was to get every detail of a carpenter's shop right, buy a sheep's head from the local butcher's and paint several dozen of it, crowding each other out in such a way that one did not have to paint any of the sheep's body (which the butcher could not provide) then find a suitable carpenter and a suitable Mary and a suitable Christ, get them to have the right dramatic expression on their faces, and paint it exactly. Often one notices in Pre-Raphaelite painting that just when the painter should be endowed with transcendent imagination, the model is expected to supply it by assuming an expression which the painter then imitates, with perfect truth to nature. Much of Pre-Raphaelite painting is just painted charades or dumb crambo by friends of the Pre-Raphaelites dressed up to fill the rôles.

Rossetti, however, who never followed the Pre-Raphaelite precepts so rigidly observed by Holman Hunt, was a poet who invented poetic symbols in painting. If one grants that *The Light of the World* and the *Scapgoat*, with their vacuous expressions, are faithful to the letter of Pre-Raphaelitism, it is Rossetti who really understood something of the spirit of fourteenth-century poetry in his painting. He was by nature a poetic symbolist painter. The crowded repetitious objects in his paintings are put there not because they are considered necessary according to the Pre-Raphaelite precepts, but because he collected objects which he loved, and their images in his pictures are crystallizations of aspects of his own personality, having the same symbolic significance of a projected egotism as the tower, the sword, the winding stair, etc., in the poetry of Yeats. Rossetti, who was truly a literary painter—with all the limitations and defects of one—hated painting out of doors, regarded Holman Hunt's painstaking pilgrimages to Palestine and elsewhere as ludicrous, cared little for the countryside, collected bric-à-brac, was as far removed from the 'nature artist' as it is possible to imagine anyone being; he was a lovable and rather monstrous personality.

Romantic poetry then was and is the 'irreducible mystery' of Pre-Raphaelitism, a poetry that lends a strange beauty to the work of some of the minor Pre-Raphaelites, such as the exquisite *Death of Chatterton* in the Tate Gallery. A thin vein of poetry shines through the early painting of Millais, though I find it difficult to regard Millais as a 'traitor' to Pre-Raphaelitism, for he was too much a painter to be a poetic illustrator like Rossetti, and, of course, too much a painter also to be a fanatic of obsessive rules like Holman Hunt. Pre-Raphaelitism introduced him to Keats, but to little else. In his later life, whenever he wished to show that he had not forsaken his

Pre-Raphaelite origins, he attempted an illustration of poetry, but the little trickle of poetry of his own had long ago dried up, and, in any case, was not relevant to his great gifts which lay in the direction of painting for its own sake. Advertising is a debased form of poetry, having about the same relation to the real thing as jazz music has to music, and it is natural that the weak poetic painter of *The Carpenter's Shop* and the *Boyhood of Raleigh* should end by painting the most staggeringly successful pictorial advertisement for soap that appeared in the nineteenth century in England.

No, the tragedy of Millais has little to do with Pre-Raphaelitism. It is the tragedy of a born painter, not of an illustrator, the tragedy of many Anglo-Saxon painters of great talent, of Sargent, of Orpen, of Augustus John and others, the tragedy also of most of our architects and to some extent of our leading novelists. It is the tragedy of our tendency to use art as a ladder by which to climb into one of the great professions, corresponding to that of the law or of medicine, the profession of Academic portraitist and landscape painter, in a country where there is no true Academic tradition. Too often our painters begin by being arty and end by being practitioners of Royal Academy photography and scene painting.

Rossetti was a poetic illustrator with a highly individualized style of his own. His skill, and that of the lesser Pre-Raphaelites, cannot be compared with the great continental achievements of the time. In painting, most of the Pre-Raphaelites should perhaps be regarded as poetic amateurs corresponding to the charming Sunday painters of France. The æsthetic aims of the movement were too unpainterly to produce anything but amateurs. A larger talent must either break away, like Millais, or unconsciously reveal the absurdity of the movement, like Holman Hunt. The lesser Pre-Raphaelites, Ford Madox Brown, Arthur Hughes and Charles Collins, produced pictures having a charming home-made quality, such as Brown's *The Last of England*, which must be judged as something entirely by itself, not related to any main tradition.

Yet, as Mr. Gaunt points out, Pre-Raphaelitism, even if not in the main line of achievement, canalized a considerable impulse in English life. This was the resistance of poetic ideas to the nineteenth century and to the Industrial Revolution. There is a clear and pure stream here which flows from Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* through the paintings and poetry and letters of Blake and his circle, through the Pre-Raphaelites and Ruskin, William Morris and the early socialist movement to the Aesthetic Movement of the nineties, where it becomes somewhat muddled, but not, in the last analysis, corrupt. Indeed, the strength and the weakness of this tendency in English life is its insistence on the value of a childlike, sometimes childish, innocence. If one compares it with the corresponding stream of

imaginative life in France, one sees that the French and the English movements flow in opposite directions.

The difference is that between puritan protestantism and Latin catholicism. The Latin catholic tendency is to accept evil as a reality of existence, damnation as part of the whole human condition and hell as part of the divine hierarchy; the protestant puritan tendency is to refuse to touch evil or to be conscious of having touched it. The Pre-Raphaelites represented the cult of a misconceived mediævalism, an attempted refusal to be contaminated by the modern world which was, in fact, a refusal to recognize that the basic condition of the life of every contemporary is that he is involved in the guilt of the whole society in which he lives. Thus the Pre-Raphaelite poetry maintained the balance of a precarious innocence which was a refusal to recognize facts, an innocence which only Holman Hunt, who never grew up, entirely accepted, which, with Rossetti, toppled over into morbidity, with Ruskin into madness, and which collapsed into the success story of Millais.

Yet somehow the Pre-Raphaelites and even the æsthetes after them, retained a certain innocuousness, an unworldliness, surrounded as their poise, which later became a pose, was with abysses. The sins of Rossetti and Wilde were the sins of children, and so were their punishments. Under his veneer of worldly wisdom and cynicism, Oscar Wilde also retained the belief in youth and innocent purity and, when he had failed to preserve his ideal, he sought out punishment. Never did a man so openly court retribution for a crime which, after all, society need never have noticed.

One of the worst penalties of Pre-Raphaelitism was that it cut English painting almost completely off from the continent. In his volume *The Aesthetic Adventure* Mr. Gaunt amusingly shows how little the English artists who went to Paris at the end of the century knew of the great movement in French art.

The French view of life was exactly the opposite of that of the English. It was, in brief, the idea of redemption through corruption with the world instead of self-preservation from corruption. Criticisms of both attitudes can, with justice, be made. But it may be said in favour of the movements in French art and literature during the nineteenth century that the poets and artists did not lay themselves and their work open to the charge that they were too inexperienced, innocent, unworldly for this era of industry and commerce and great scientific purposes. The French artists wrung their triumphs of transcendent beauty from a hard realization of the standards of the age in which they lived. Thus, more than any other people in the world, they saved poetry and painting from the most dangerous of all charges that have been laid against the arts in England: that they

belonged to a childishly imaginative and undeveloped level of consciousness which man had outgrown in the scientific and industrial era of Victoria, and of Bismarck, and of Napoleon III.

## W. H. Auden in America

By HENRY REED

FIVE or six years after the original excitement which Auden's first volumes awoke, one began to be conscious of certain disappointments. His early verse was usually too obscure to give complete satisfaction, but its freshness and gusto and assurance had given one a good deal to delight in ; as he emerged into clearer statements one began to be rather suspicious of him ; a good deal of *Look Stranger !* seemed disturbingly glib, and one had a sense of having been a little taken in, which was strengthened by the imitations of Rilke in some of the sonnets in *Journey to a War*, by the verse parts of *On the Frontier*, and by much of *Another Time*. In his first poem from America, *New Year Letter*, he dropped to a nadir of dullness from which it seemed unlikely that he would recover. Yet his new volume is full of life ; above all, one feels glad that the leading poet of his generation should have had time to plan and execute long works of scope and complexity. Brilliant as Auden often is as a lyric poet, he is the sort of poet who, by reason of his preoccupation with moral problems, demands space to spread himself in.

His new book consists of two works : *The Sea and the Mirror*, which is described as a commentary on *The Tempest* ; and a Christmas Oratorio which gives the book its title, *For the Time Being*. It is a good title for such a book, since the book is about one stage in a religious and moral development. Conversion would perhaps be the wrong word. One is converted, this way or that, many times ; one develops only once. The poems are not immediately easy to understand, but on the whole they are easy to read. And they compel one to read them as *New Year Letter* did not ; after a mere glance at certain pages, lines slip permanently, as one believes, into the mind, full of gravity, charm or humour. Prospero's opening words to Ariel, for example :

share my resigning thoughts

As you have served my revelling wishes : then, brave spirit,

Agts to you of song and daring, and to me

Briefly Milan, then earth. . . .

and his words of farewell :

*Sing, Ariel, sing,  
Sweetly, dangerously*



*Out of the sour  
And shiftless water,  
Lucidly out  
Of the dozing tree. . . .*

and the boozy song of the Master and the Boatswain :

The nightingales are sobbing in  
The orchards of our mothers,  
And hearts that we broke long ago  
Have long been breaking others ;  
Tears are round, the sea is deep,  
Roll them overboard and sleep. . . .

and Miranda's opening line :

My Dear One is mine, as mirrors are lonely. . . .

and Ariel's song to Caliban :

Weep no more but pity me,  
Fleet persistent shadow cast  
By your lameness, caught at last. . . .

Here at least is poetry which moves one and sets one expectantly turning the pages.

*The Sea and the Mirror* describes a development. The sea is life the mirror is art, and the points which Auden makes about both—and, like Eliot, he does not pretend that art is more to be bothered about than life—are cunningly led up to. The twin subjects of the commentary are announced at the beginning of the poem. We are to imagine the aftermath of a performance of *The Tempest* : in front of the curtain the stage-manager is speaking to the critics (in that flowing stanza-form which is Auden's best and most characteristic contribution to prosody). He deals with our response to art, and with the fact that, when the book is closed, or the circus performance over, we have to return to the major problems of life, which neither art nor science can really help us with :

The lion's mouth whose hunger  
No metaphors can fill.

And next, all the characters parade before us ; they all have their say, many of them in a traditional form. Some of these are highly successful : Miranda's *villanelle*, Ferdinand's elaborate sonnet, the song of the Boatswain and Master, the little song of Trinculo ; other fail largely by reason of the verse-forms themselves : Sebastian's *sestina* and Stephano's *ballade* are virtually impenetrable. The most profound of the minor characters' comments are those of Alonso admonishing his son ; and they are framed in an original stanza of Auden's own devising.

Principally, however, our attention is fixed on the four characters who extend, or seem to extend, beyond the framework of Shakespeare's

play: Shakespeare's own implicit question-marks. First, Prospero, 'the personified type of the creative,' who as he bids goodbye to his magic gift and questions it and wonders about it, is at the same time the artist brooding on and bidding goodbye to his art.

I never suspected the way of truth  
Was a way of silence. . . .

Secondly, there is Antonio, Prospero's brother, the only human character in the play who has uttered no word of reconciliation (such remarks indeed as he makes in Shakespeare's Act V are still contemptuous and satirical). Antonio is the residual evil in us, a ghost that cannot be laid; other hashes may be settled, but not his. One recalls an early remark of Auden's that psychology is the examination of evil; and Antonio is a personification of the Id, the reservoir of wholly self-centred instinctual urges. The others may be settled happily in their devotions at the conclusion of the story; but Antonio is irreconcilable—and always there. 'We love ourselves alone,' Auden has elsewhere said, echoing perhaps a tragic conclusion of Groddeck's. Antonio is a projection of that horrible truth; and it is he whose sardonic comments thread together the poems allotted to the minor characters. He is doubtless other things as well: the 'death-wish' opposed to the promises of love and dedication in the other characters; and also the artist's 'subject' always there demanding to be written about, even after Prospero has put aside his art.

Finally there is Caliban, and with him Ariel. Caliban's long speech is in prose and is the climax of the poem. He comes down to the footlights and delivers an address which begins coyly as a parody of Henry James's prefaces, and ends boldly in a style which would be recognizable anywhere as Auden's own, and no one else's. The Jamesian section is about art; the Audenesque section is about problems which James never approached. Caliban speaks for us first the questions of the audience, who are shocked at the intrusion into the drama of Caliban himself: 'the unrectored chaos.' Why, Caliban cries, speaking as the Audience's echo, has 'our so great, so good, so dead author' allowed this Thing to be left over? He explains, first addressing himself to any young would-be creators who may be in the audience—'who have come here, not to be entertained but to learn'—just what Caliban and Ariel are, and what Prospero's release of them symbolizes. We know already from the Prospero chapter that Ariel is Prospero's gift of seeing, his 'principle of reflection,' the artist's power of interpreting and communicating. Now it turns out that Caliban, sprawling among the reeds, thoroughly disgusting, is the other part of Ariel. And we may remember that, in Shakespeare, Ariel and Caliban were both children of the witch Sycorax. Both are irrational, but Caliban is the low, coarse, ungovernable element of the consciousness, Ariel the supernatural gift of understanding and

creating. They are the inseparable (and indissmissible) sources of the artist's power.

Caliban now turns back to the audience proper, and at great length, with a wealth of brilliantly funny imagery, delivers himself of the 'point' of the book. The audience, he says, really know the answers to their questions about Art: their asking them is principally a sign that they have really begun to move from a state of passivity. There are, now, two possible wrong, dead, roads along which they may go, or attempt to go. The one is an attempt to discover a world of fake childhood, a world of looking to others for comfort, a world conceived as free and without responsibility ('Pick me up, Uncle, let little Johnny ride away on your massive shoulders to recover his green kingdom . . .'); the other is a world of false adulthood which achieves a state of disregarding the separate existence of others, a world likewise free and irresponsible ('that blessed realm, so far above the twelve impertinent winds and the four unreliable seasons; that Heaven of the Really General Case . . .').

Such are the alternative routes, the facile glad-handed highway or the virtuous averted track, by which the human effort to make its own future arrives all eager at its abruptly dreadful end.

There remains the right way: the realization that life is a dramatic act, to be performed because we are commanded to do so; and the realization that we shall always perform it badly. Our great 'moment' is when we feel, for the first time with understanding and acceptance, the breath from the 'Wholly Other Life.'

Yet, at this very moment when we do at last see ourselves as we are, neither cosy nor playful, but swaying out on the ultimate wind-whipped cornice that overhangs the unabiding void—we have never stood anywhere else—, when our reasons are silenced by the heavy huge derision,—There is nothing to say. There never has been—, and our wills chuck in their hands—There is no way out. There never was—, it is at this moment that for the first time in our lives we hear, not the sounds which, as born actors, we have hitherto condescended to use as an excellent vehicle for displaying our personalities and looks, but the real Word which is our only *raison d'être*.

Some hint of this has already been uttered by Ferdinand in 'his sonnet, where he sees the pattern of his love for Miranda surrounded by another and invisible pattern:

I would smile at no other promise than touch, taste, sight,  
Were there not, my enough, my exaltation, to bless  
As world is offered world, as I hear it to-night

Placing with ours for us, another tenderness  
That neither without either could or would possess,  
The Right Required Time, The Real Right Place, O Light.

And this by its echo sends us farther back, to the lines from Emily Brontë which are used as an epigraph to the whole work :

Speak, God of Visions, plead for me  
And tell why I have chosen thee.

That is to say, Auden here affirms a belief in a supernatural which commands us, and which is at the same time at our command. (This is the theme of Emily Brontë's poem.) The announcement of this belief in *The Sea and the Mirror* is the first clause of a huge sentence. On the other side of the colon stands the Christmas Oratorio, which deals with one crystallization of the supernatural into the natural. The fact that the Oratorio is a failure as a poem proves perhaps nothing more than that Auden has his defects as a poet. Some of these defects appear to be no more than wrong choices of manner, the assumption that a 'gag' is good merely because it is a gag. In the Oratorio (surely not seriously meant at any point to be set to music ?) there is abundant versatility, but with it a good deal of flashiness and pointlessness daring. It does not lack good moments : some of its social commentary is excellent ; Rachel's monody, the song of Mary over the Babe, the final speech of the narrator, are very memorable. But it is not on the level—achieved with care and thought—of *The Sea and the Mirror*. Its interest is in its acceptance of the Christian story as the best allegory of life for us, and for the time being. At no point has Auden relinquished the criticism of human behaviour which he derives from Freud—Mary's lullaby uses it poignantly. His curiosity about humanity is not the curiosity of the great creator of character—of a Shakespeare or a Henry James. *They* observe, and sift, and feel, and suffer, themselves. Auden is principally concerned with the way people in varying ways confirm what he already knows : this is at once his originality and his limitation. But in this book a new dimension has been added to his vision. *The Sea and the Mirror* is about a discovery, the greatest discovery that we can make, if we can make it. It is vivid, beautiful and vigorous ; and for the first time in his life Auden seems, despite his aplomb and wit and assurance, to be genuinely humble. One does not feel, as so often before, the word *explicit* written firmly at the end, the paper blotted, the pen returned sharply to the inkpot, and a severe glance cast round the class. And poetically the new book comes as an exciting new beginning.



# THE EUROPEAN AUDIENCE

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## Jean-Paul Sartre and *Huis Clos*\*

By ALEXANDRE ASTRUC

*Translated from the French by John Rodker*

IN our contemporary theatre, where all that is 'theatre' is systematically ignored, where every effort, by clever or costly presentation, so far as circumstances permit, is made to redeem poverty of script or half-baked versifying, a theatre where speech-day eloquence, good intentions and ill feelings take the place of dramatic tension, this new play by Jean-Paul Sartre, which makes language the very essence and action of the play, appears as an event of considerable importance. Once before Sartre, in *Les Mouches*, with its conflicts, its style, succeeded in resuscitating a tradition of tragedy which we had forgotten since Corneille. *Huis Clos* reminds us to-day that drama is that art in which speech stars, since drama cannot be anything but speech and since, as the great Corneille put it, 'there things only happen through speech.'

As a play, then, *Huis Clos* may be considered perfect. And primarily because nothing whatever happens. From the rising of the curtain to its fall—the tragedy is played straight through, without intervals or scene-changing—not a single external event intervenes: the action derives solely from the confrontation of the characters. Yet it must not be thought that this is a psychological play: I do not see how one could possibly consider the characters typical, nor are their parts anywhere determined by truthfulness to type. What especially makes the perfection of *Huis Clos* is that the parts make no claim to *express* a psychological entity, but evolve as it were from the play itself, everything that happens to the characters resulting from what they say. Such action as there is derives solely from the inability of the actors to refrain from the speech that leads them to destruction: none of it would have happened had they determined to stay mum.

But first, what is *Huis Clos*? *Huis Clos* is hell, but a hell not very different from existence: a hell minus the stake, gridirons, glowing coals: a hell where words are the sole torture. The set is a Second Empire salon, without windows or mirrors, though containing a bronze group, an illuminated chandelier and sofas. Into this salon a valet, exactly like all film valets, in turn introduces Garcin the

\* *Huis Clos* (*In Camera*), by Jean-Paul Sartre, has been running at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier in Paris. This article first appeared in *Poésie*.



*Vitagraph*

*Vitagraph*



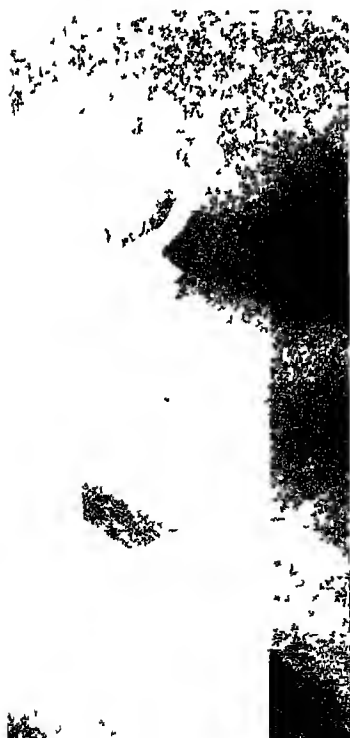
THE MASK OF DIMITRI: (Above) Sidney Greenstreet and Peter Lorre. (Below) Zachary Scott.



20th Century Fox

LAURA : (Above) Dana  
Andrews and Gene Tierney,  
(Below) Gene Tierney.





great ballerinas of Soviet  
 Russia (Above) Galina Ulanova  
 in *The Dying Swan* the role made  
 famous by Pavlova. Ulanova  
 considered by many to be the  
 greatest classical dancer of her  
 time (Below) Marina Semyonova in a  
 scene from *Swan Lake*. Semyonova is  
 famous above all for her supreme  
 virtuosity, she is the leading baller-  
 ina of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow,  
 while Ulanova is the leading ballerina  
 of Leningrad.



deserter, Inez the Lesbian and Estelle the infanticide. At first they are surprised to find no instruments of torture, no torturer ; it surprises them, too, to find themselves all three together, when they had never met in existence, when there seems nothing to have brought them together. But soon Inez discovers the truth : they are there to torture each other by their words and demeanour. Each must assume the part of torturer to his companions : hell is—others.

Using this as his starting point, Sartre has managed to extract the maximum dramatic effect and, departing from an idea in seeming abstract and philosophical, to construct one of the tensest, barest plays imaginable. For a start he shows us a man who refuses to play the game. Hell is others ! Who cares, says Garcin ? He will not budge from his sofa, will stuff his ears, will say not a word, and will withdraw into himself regardless of his neighbours. Let the others do likewise and all will be saved : they have only to hide behind a total solipsism and deny the existence of others. Thus the schemes of the gods will be circumvented.

This opening is wonderful. Nothing has ever moved me more than this man, head in hands, who strives to be silent, evade his destiny, repulse evil. Alas ! his silence soon ends. At the other end of the stage—and I should like to say here how perfect the placing and set both are—at the other end of the stage, Inez is trying to win Estelle. The latter looks for a mirror in which to make herself up, but no one now has a mirror : they were taken away in the office, as a prisoner has his braces taken away. For a mirror is itself another, it almost replaces another, you can live alone with a mirror and the devoted complacent image it reflects. How will Estelle manage without this image ? Inez then shall be her mirror, her lark-mirror, she says, in which to see herself, read herself, and get stuck : it is the very symbol of seduction. Inez lends herself like an inanimate object to Estelle, because she too needs another's awareness, and because she hopes, little by little, to dominate her, destroy her liberty and make her live through her own eyes. Thus, from the outset, we know that neither of these women can be self-sufficient or a law unto herself. They need the eyes of others, the sufferings of others : they are ripe for torture.

There remains Garcin. Throughout all this scene he has said nothing, made no motion. Does this mean that he is alone, truly alone ? No, he is with others, others who talk of him there on earth, in that smoke-filled newspaper office in which, in shirt-sleeves, he worked so many nights. He listens, he strains desperately to hear what they are saying of him, how they judge what he did. All these evocations of existence which bring, as it were, a gust of fresh air into this oven, are intensely poignant and sad. But now Inez comes and tears him from his retreat. But Estelle pushes her away, because she is a woman

and it's a man she wants : Garcin has won, let him take her. Then Garcin, after resisting a little, rises, utters some irreparable words and casts himself resolutely into hell. The tragedy is set : none of the characters have been able to resist its spell : they have fallen into the bird-lime of the consciousness of others. The infernal machine starts to tick. Nothing can ever stop it again.

From this point the play unwinds, without cuts, as Garcin says, and with a clarity, an inevitability, a dramatic drive wholly implicit in the dialogue. But first, each must confess his baseness to the others. Inez and Estelle spread themselves to the light and luxuriate in the recital of their wickedness. Only Garcin hides his secret. But soon, he too is led to reveal himself : down there, old friends, his comrades on the Pacifist paper, are trying his case, treating him as a coward because he jumped into a train when war was declared (and because he fled to the frontier) instead of getting himself killed for the cause. He is not a martyr : he is a coward. It is in vain that, at the far end of the stage, Garcin makes every effort to enter into communication with them, to clutch again at existence and prove it was not fear that made him fly to the frontier. So far as he is concerned the stakes are laid : he is out of the game. His life has shut on itself and come full circle : his acts have been judged once and for all, they no longer belong to him : they lie in eternity under the diffused light shed by others. Nothing remains to him therefore but to turn back to his companions in torture and convince them of his innocence. As it happens Estelle is there at his side, imploring his kisses and man's embrace : let her trust him, let her only say he was not afraid and he can face the judgment of posterity : one single accepting conscience suffices to save a man from hell. Garcin rejoices, in gratitude clasps her to him, but someone behind them bursts into laughter. It is Inez. How can Garcin have any faith in what Estelle tells him, she would say anything to please him, win him : her approval does not count. For it to mean anything it would have to issue from a free, a sincere conscience. Is that true, asks Garcin ? I would love you *even* if you were a coward, Estelle confesses. It is hell.

This answer is perhaps the key to the tragedy : it is also that to Sartre's philosophy. What man desires is the free judgment of others : he has no use for a conscience willingly slave. Yet, equally, he must work on the liberty of others since he wishes to have himself endowed with some quality or other : that is, he demands a liberty that never ceases to be free even while it submits to his own. That is why this recourse to others bears its own contradiction in itself, however impossible to avoid, men being unable to be satisfied with their own opinion of themselves. And that is why others will always be hell—and I do not very well see how Sartre will manage, as he intends in his next play, to place heaven in them too.

These reflections may lead astray the superficial who will start clamouring about the play's subtlety, its metaphysics. It is not because *Huis Clos* contains most of the themes presented by Sartre in *L'Être et le Néant*, nor because the drama argued out is unusually complex and profound that one cannot accept it as a clever demonstration of a system of philosophy. The thing that disconcerts is that the play, as I say, does not contain a single incident and that we have here only a long debate between three characters. From that to calling it a play of ideas is obviously a step, but a step it would be very wrong to take. For if the play rests on a philosophy, the latter has become so charged and alive that far from explaining the play it is the play itself. Once before, reading *L'Être et le Néant* I felt I had read a story as exciting, as absorbing as a detective novel: sure sign of the truth and vitality of Sartre's phenomenology. Not for an instant did I find in *Huis Clos* the abstractness or cerebrality it has pleased some to discover. I cannot see how the relations of individuals to each other could be presented with greater verisimilitude nor how a stage-art more intense, dramatic, richer or better constructed could be imagined: nor a drama that would be purer or more effectively theatre. Going out, a friend said that what bothered him was that the play as a *spectacle* was non-existent: it is clear that we are here very remote from the theatre dreamt by MM. Baty, Antonin Artaud and Jean-Louis Barrault which was to consecrate the triumph of sight over sound. I do not regret it a moment. The théâtre is primarily people talking and it can never be anything else.

Another thing which, to my mind, increases the sense of truth and perfection communicated by *Huis Clos* is the way Sartre uses speech, or rather dialogue. If hell is others, so too is speech, for it is by speech that man's relation to others is revealed: it is created by speech. Garcin, Inez and Estelle are victims of their words: they get stuck in the words they utter, and these soon turn against them to become the instrument of their torture. By questions and talk they hasten towards torment and enter the road that leads to punishment. As in certain dialogues in Dostoevsky it is the words that compel feeling, outstrip it and literally construct it *en bloc* (in diametric opposition to academic psychology), so that it is the speech itself which is the very motive power of the drama. This is apparent in the scene described, when Garcin strives to evade the implacable torture-machine. It is perhaps even more so towards the end, for when, to his repeated blows, hell's portals at last swing open, he draws back, not from the fire which he sees at the end of the passage, but at the thought that he is going, conquered by the words of that other to whom he has had to trust his destiny. So he again shuts the door and again darts at Inez in a last effort to make her admit his innocence, force her to weave the words of that flattering image of himself that will promise

him salvation. It is a difficult task, says Inez, impossible perhaps, and one that only death will cut short, as in Mme Simone de Beauvoivre's *l'Invitée* where action, destroying the consciousness of another, thus wipes out his words. For here there is only speech and nothing to oppose it, not even death, since the characters are already dead. That is perhaps what made Sartre choose the domain of death rather than of existence. There can be neither dénouement nor exit, and after Estelle's murderous attempt on Inez, the characters settle themselves again on their respective sofas: hell continues.

I do not know why some have thought to discern immoral designs in this play, a predilection towards filth and degradation, a self-satisfied and cynical display of the worst in people. There would be no need to dwell on this point, art having nothing to do with morals, nor, I hasten to add, with immorality, were there not here a regrettable confusion as regards Sartre's work. For it seems to be generally held that *La Nausée* and *Le Mur* are immoral books, immoral in the same way as *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for instance, full of a low sexuality, erotic, and dwelling on the ugliest, most materialist aspects of existence. That is why they are admired or rejected (naturally in the name of the liberty of art or contrariwise, of its dignity): that apparently is what constitutes its significance and worth. Given such premisses Sartre goes to join Freud, de Sade and the *para-surréaliste* writers: *La Nausée* becomes the pathological diary of a neurotic: *Intimité*, a tale of a frigid woman: *Erostrate*, that of an anarchist, *La Chambre* an apologia of lunacy and *L'Enfance d'un Chef* an admirable short story not justly appreciated for its antipathy to the romanticism of those 'childhood reminiscences' that always go a little deeper—depth being evidently the main consideration!—than *Jean Barois*, *Le Grand Meaulnes* or that psychoanalytic *Diary of a Young Girl*. All this therefore takes on a medical slant—almost scientific: the work of a thinker who has lovingly dwelt on human misery, and is ever ready to display its most painful abscesses to the light of day. As to the anti-romantic, anti-realist, anti-naturalist aspects of Sartre's æsthetic to be found in the last pages of *L'Imaginaire*, that they prefer to ignore.

I confess that this basic lack of understanding does not astonish me. It is natural that an age which understands neither Corneille nor Aeschylus, which took Pirandello for a disciple of Freud, Lautréamont for a forerunner of Surrealism, which sees in Chestov a great philosopher, which in the same existentialism confounds both Husserl and Nietzsche, which prefers gossip memoirs to novels and reportage to metaphysics, which reduces criticism to novelized biography, pathological analysis, or occult influences, which confounds poetry with mysticism, which turns every writer into a moral arbiter, a

doctor or photographer, it is natural, I say, that this age should merely consider Sartre a belated disciple of Zola, Proust or Freud, a realist, a materialist, a seamy-sider, or still more simply a first-class pornographer to be recommended solely to pimply young men and those who frequent the psychoanalytic clinics of the Paris suburbs. All this is in the nature of things. But still it surprises me that no one has yet pointed out that everything Sartre has written is antagonistic to sensation and 'matter': that far from finding delectation in their baser instincts the heroes of *La Nausée* and especially of *Le Mur* first and foremost long to forget them and that Sartre's moral standpoint grounded in ideas of worth, of being, of the satisfaction of pure consciousness, stands in direct opposition to the sensual materialism of the instant. Much might be objected to this moral standpoint: that of being too intellectual, of completely ignoring the body, its absence of altruism: but it is wholly impossible to see therein any exaltation of sensual pleasure, just as, and for a very simple reason, sexual problems do not one moment enter into *Huis Clos* because radically the characters are pure consciences minus their bodies. As in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* the conflict is one of conscience: tortured souls confront each other and the end they pursue is the domination, humiliation and suffering of the other. In any case, it is a moral play in the most everyday and banal sense of the term, for one must never forget that we are in hell, and that the three characters, the deserter and the infanticide like the Lesbian, are damned for their sins.

Actually, Garcin's crime is not that of being a coward—is he one, anyway? No one will ever know, he died before he could prove his courage: he died too soon (but one always dies too soon). Nor that of Estelle in being an infanticide, nor naturally that of Inez in being Lesbian. Their real sin is having made others suffer during their existence, of having wanted to live through the tortured conscience of another. Garcin had made his wife suffer, Inez her girl friend, Estelle her lover: they will be punished in that wherein they sinned: through others. Thus, in the end, Garcin's cowardice like Inez's sexuality, are their *punishment*, rather than their sin. Garcin will suffer through his cowardice (or his impossibility of showing his courage: which comes to the same): Inez through her inversion and Estelle through her sensuality. The punishment, if it comes from others, is nevertheless rooted in the conscience of each of the characters. They themselves are their own torturers.

This play is underpinned by a dialogue wonderfully bare and effective, a dialogue which attains a pathos more direct and stark than any to be found on the stage of to-day where facile versifying holds sway everywhere. A certain complexity, a certain philosophic aridity do not manage to detract from the whole which affects one like some

prodigious series of verbal equations, weaving its fatal web about the actors. It is clear that in Sartre we have not only a playwright but a dramatic author : two things which do not always go together. It is an event that requires a tribute.

The set by M. Raymond Rouleau, admirably bare, points to an understanding of the text which visually underlines its least intentions. Here is a producer who knows how to direct actors : one with the surest sense of their placing and gestures. M. Michel Vitold, tortured, rasping, is a completely convincing Garcin. Mlle Tania Bachalova is lucid passion and intelligence personified : she has the ruthlessness and callousness needed for her part. I might possibly object that in the almost mechanical precision of her acting she does not allow a little of the crazed apprehension, that agony of women of her kind to appear which is one of the most tragic things on earth.

As for Mlle Gaby Sylvia, she has found her best part here. She has the nonchalance, the perverse grace, the tranquil assurance of her rôle. She is astonishingly convincing, and unaggressively, calmly and with a terrible artlessness she acts the crushing part of a common slut in a lovely body. She is a very great actress.

## A Mirror to Darkness

By J. MACLAREN-ROSS

*Symbolism and Melodrama in the new American Films*

ONCE, while working for a British film company, I was asked to write a specimen script of Graham Greene's novel *The Confidential Agent*. All reference to the Spanish civil war would have to be deleted, however, I was told : presumably for fear of offending Franco. I pointed out that no such reference is made in the novel ; certainly a civil war is taking place, but in an unnamed country, and the rival agents are known only by their initials.

But the producer was still not satisfied : 'Tell you what,' he said, 'how about shifting the action to *this* war, and have it all happen in Lisbon. Or Dublin.'

I said : 'Then why base the film on Greene's book at all? Let me do an original script about Nazi agents in Lisbon and Dublin.'

'You've got something there,' said the producer.

In the end the film was never made.

I am reminded of this incident by the fact that the most significant films which have appeared during the past two years have all been (a)

American, (b) that they have been based (with one exception, *Double Indemnity*) on novels with ideas behind them, written by authors in complete control of their own medium. In most cases, also, the scripts adhered faithfully to the books from which they were adapted : consequently some view of life does emerge beyond the intrigue and the action.

The films to which I refer are : *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key* (Dashiell Hammett), *The Mask of Dimitrios* (Eric Ambler), *Double Indemnity* and *Laura* (Vera Caspary).

That they should all of them be concerned with crimes of violence makes them, to my mind, all the more significant : like the books on which four of them were based, an apt comment on our melodramatic violent age.

The first of them to appear was John Huston's production of *The Maltese Falcon*. This novel had been screened several times before, once with Bebé Daniels and Ricardo Cortez ; I saw only a version starring Bette Davis and Warren William. It was a most astonishing piece of work. Almost nothing remained of the original story ; not even the title : it was called *Satan Met a Lady*.

The *Maltese Falcon* itself, 'the stuff that dreams are made of,' turned into something called the French Horn, which Charlemagne was claimed to have blown through ; later on it was filled with jewels ; on its track came Arthur Treacher as an Englishman with a rolled umbrella and a bowler hat ; he packed a gun and a whisky-flask on his hip ; everyone got enormously drunk and made wise-cracks over the corpses scattered about ; the Fat Man became a dear old lady called Madame Barrabas, who when the characters got out of hand called them to order by firing off a pistol at the ceiling ; instead of the boy Wilmer she had as a bodyguard a psychopathic nephew in a *béret basque*, who was constantly being fobbed off with promises of having Warren William to 'play with.'

As comedy-drama this was brilliant, but it was difficult to understand why the script-writer, whose imagination had conjured up these completely new characters, bothered to acknowledge a debt to Dashiell Hammett at all.

Then, some years later, Huston—a young man in his late twenties—hit on the original idea of making a film which would follow, scene for scene, the book exactly as Hammett wrote it. Huston did the script himself ; it contained the original dialogue and situations ; here in fact was the story one read in 1930 and the characters as one might have imagined them : Joel Cairo with his scented visiting-cards and his high-pitched hysterical menace ; Brigid O'Shaughnessy enmeshed in a tangle of her own lies ; Gutman with his jouncing jowls and his treacherous joviality ; the gunsels kicking Sam Spade's head with tears of anger and humiliation in his eyes.

Humphrey Bogart put up a fine performance as Spade : the sudden savage sugary laugh, the shamefaced grin after a neurotic outburst of glass-throwing and door-slamming. Here was all the pride and arrogance ; the curious code of loyalty and the sense of justice ( ' Don't be so sure that I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be ' ) carefully concealed beneath the bad reputation and the taut cynical mask. Here, too, Sidney Greenstreet appeared for the first time in a star part : the huge stomach and the too-short sleeves, the fruity Claridges voice and the waddling nimble walk : always ready with the levelled pistol or the doped drink : always ready to forgive, and to make a deal with, the man he has caused to be drugged and beaten up.

Next came another Dashiell Hammett : *The Glass Key*. This time the script, done by Jonathan Latimer, was a little less faithful to its original ; Latimer, in his own right a brilliant detective-story writer, introduced a touch of comedy into the final scene, and by converting Paul Madvig into a clown removed the stain of guilt and betrayal from the lovers ; and the dream which gives the title to the book and foretells an unhappy ending to the love-affair, was left out altogether. Corruption and brutality were there in plenty—one wonders how Beaumont survived the beating up and the headlong dive through the glass awning—but the sombre sense of hopelessness which pervades the book is somehow lacking.

Alan Ladd, Brian Donlevy, Veronica Lake, and Joseph Calleia were in the cast ; but it was a new actor, William Bendix, who stole the picture as a sadistic snivelling thug : choking his boss with maudlin sobs of self-pity, wiping his nose with his sleeve, and pulling the backs off chairs as in childhood he might have pulled the wings off flies.

The underlying theme in both these films is betrayal. Sam Spade in *The Falcon* betrays his partner with the partner's wife, then betrays the murderess of the partner to the police, although she has been his mistress in the meantime ; Beaumont in *The Glass Key* betrays his best friend by stealing from him the senator's daughter ; the gangster-bosses and their hirelings betray one another endlessly ; the detectives and the district-attorneys cast around for fall-guys, irrespective of innocence or guilt, to preserve their professional reputation : anyone may be sold up at a moment's notice, as a matter of expediency.

Hammett wrote these novels in the nineteen-thirties : they were set in the lawless machine-gun-swept streets of American cities, where policemen and politicians were openly corrupt. But the atmosphere of distrust and terror engendered by such conditions was not confined to the U.S.A. ; the glass key had indeed snapped in the lock and the door could no longer be closed against the snakes—although immense publicity given to American gang-warfare contrived to draw attention



from more sinister trends elsewhere. (The film *Scarface* was billed in 1932 as 'The Shame of a Nation.')

Now, caught in close-up on the screen, the murderous activities of these power-intoxicated puppets begin to acquire a symbolical value that reaches far beyond their ostensible purpose and setting ; in five years of war we have become accustomed to the constant double-shuffle, the ready change of front and the trumped-up charge ; we have seen without surprise the machine-gun turned upon the liberated ally : treachery is part of our daily times.

At roughly the same period as *The Glass Key*, an attempt was made to adapt Graham Greene's *A Gun for Sale*, filmed as *This Gun for Hire*. Although technically competent, the adaptation, by omitting every significant item of the book on which it was based, reduced it to ordinary thriller-level ; one can see that the original story, a plot by industrialists to promote war in the interests of their own combine, would not readily recommend itself to the film-magnates ; but worse still the scene was switched from England to the United States, Los Angeles substituted for Nottingham, a Hollywood mansion for the horrible furnished room with the double bed and the wireless blaring away ; the gunman, good-looking Alan Ladd again, had a smashed wrist instead of a hare-lip and died, smiling, for his country with the heroine's approval.

It seems extraordinary that no attempt has been made to do for Graham Greene what John Huston did for Hammett : why not a British film of *The Confidential Agent*, not set in Lisbon or Dublin, but in its original background of Bloomsbury hotels and the Dover Road ? But Greene's novels continue to be filmed in America ; *This Gun for Hire* was followed by a fantastic Fritz Lang version of *The Ministry of Fear* : all the tatty terror of the book tidied away and taking place in an odd city, supposed to be London, full of Dickensian characters in wing-collars, secondhand bookshops twice the size of Foyles, and tube-shelters to which the sound of the All Clear can penetrate.

Eric Ambler next engaged the attention of the film companies. We had in quick succession an outrageously bad production of *Background to Danger* and a near-miss in *Journey into Fear*. Then came Jean Negulesco, a Roumanian caricaturist turned film-director, with *The Mask of Dimitrios*. This was eminently satisfactory : Greerstreet at the top of his form ; Peter Lorre in a sympathetic part for once ; and a talented newcomer, Zachary Scott, as Dimitrios, the elusive, the pimp turned master-spy.

The background and the minor characters were meticulously observed (though one is saddened to see Eduardo Cianelli wasted as a profile with only one sardonic crack allotted him) : Faye Emerson as the night-club queen with sequins and a bedraggled fan and a shiny sensual face ; Bulić's wife licking turkish delight from her

fingers and wiping them on her skirt ; the archives-official so proud of his simple filing-system. But quite apart from its excellence as cinema, the film had enormous social significance : all the more since politics are not directly mentioned in it. One again becomes aware of the shadow-play in the darkness beyond the lighted pane ; the shabby killer with his wolfish face skulking outside the Underground ; the endless struggle for power going on out of sight, out of the newspaper headlines : sometimes flourishing openly at peace conferences and diplomatic receptions.\*

The violent dupes serve their purpose and are done away with : Bulić shoots himself—poor misguided uxorious fool—even Dimitrios dies in the end and Mr. Peters is led away by the *agents de police* ; but Grodek, the man behind, the employer of spy-labour, keeps cleverly out of trouble : retires airily to write a *Life of St. Francis* with Siamese cats and Scotch whisky as his chosen companions ; straddling over the log-fire in his comfortable brocaded dressing-gown, he says of Bulić's suicide : ' After all, he was a traitor, and one cannot sentimentalize over traitors.' How many heroic and helpless rebellions against corrupt powers have received just such an epitaph in our day. Dimitrios may be despicable, but the Grodeks are the real danger, because they remain unsuspected and influential. Not for them the bullet in the dark or the bayonet in the guts, but the safe sick-bed in the private ward and the epitaph in *The Times*.

*Double Indemnity* and *Laura* are in a different category of violence altogether. Away from the shadow-world of intrigue into the personal world of sexual passion, and in both cases sexual passion leads to killing.

Many people with whom I have discussed these two pictures prefer *Double Indemnity*. They are those who are seduced by the glamour of the sordid : the floosie with the bangle round her ankle, the scenes in which the characters are striped like convicts by the shadows of the latticed blinds, the middle-class setting of shirt-sleeves and insurance-policies.

It is a first-person film, the cinematic equivalent of those tough American short novels current in 1936 : *They Shoot Horses, So I Killed Her*, and so on. James M. Cain wrote the story, the script was by Raymond Chandler, considered by many critics to be the equal of Hammett himself. The theme is a new perversion of *The Postman* ; violent yen at first sight leads to murder-plot against husband of Tiger Woman : told in flashbacks by a tough insurance salesman who confuses murder with honeysuckle and honeysuckle with murder—dying of a bullet-wound given him by his girl-friend before the film opens. It compared unfavourably with the French version of *The*

\*A similar symbolism is inherent in the spy-melodramas of Alfred Hitchcock which I am examining in a separate essay.

*Postman* called *Le Dernier Tournant*; the characters kept on turning out good *au fond*, beneath the fashionable sordid surface: the daughter of the murderer, who started off well as an insolent shrew with an eye for men and ended up oddly as the embodiment of innocence; the hectoring lawyer with a heart of gold; everyone fundamentally good except for the husband (because the Hays Office doesn't allow nice people to have their heads bashed in) and the Tiger Woman herself—and even *she* faltered a bit at the finish.

Personally I preferred *Laura* by far. The dialogue was the most subtle and scintillating I have heard on a sound-track for years; for once the script-writers had improved considerably on the novelist's conception; from the first fade-in: the darkened screen and the sad impressive interior monologue, to the last scenes full of terrific suspense: *Laura* turning out light after light, locking herself in with the murderer when she believes she is alone in the flat; the murderer screwing his face up with a shudder of revulsion as he loads the shotgun and his recorded voice on the radio recites Ernest Dowson.

Sex is again the motivating factor: an egotistical New York columnist with a Pygmalion complex, probably impotent, plans to kill his own creation, 'the best part of myself,' so that no one else shall possess her. Having shot the wrong girl by mistake, he sets out to rectify his error and would have succeeded—but for the fact that he closes his eyes when about to squeeze the trigger.

Clifton Webb as Waldo Lydecker, the columnist, gives us for once on the screen a complete portrait: the bitter pride and the waspish wisecrack, the affectation covering up the sense of inadequacy: a character pitiable and repellent, capable of murder for humanly-comprehensible, though warped, motives. Here is an example of the dialogue from the opening sequence; Dana Andrews, as Macpherson the detective, questions Lydecker as to his relations with *Laura*:

'*Laura* considered me the wisest, the wittiest, the most interesting man she had ever met. I was in complete agreement with her on that point. She also considered me the kindest, the gentlest, the most sympathetic man in the world.'

'D'you agree with her there, too?'

'You won't understand this, Macpherson. But for her sake I tried to become . . . the kindest, the gentlest, the most sympathetic man in the world.'

'Have any luck?'

'Let me put it this way. I should be sincerely sorry to see my neighbour's child devoured by wolves . . . shall we go?'

Dialogue of this sort, on a level with that of the best modern American novels, is extremely rare in films: for that reason alone *Laura* would be remarkable. But there are many other outstanding features: the uncompromising presentation of detestable traits in the

minor characters : the sloppily handsome young fake with the southern accent whom Laura is engaged to until she finds out he lives on women ; the older woman who wants him at all cost ; even the detective-hero is a pervert who falls in love with the heroine's corpse. There is one magnificent necrophilous scene : Dana Andrews sweating and swilling whisky from a tumbler, wandering from room to room in the huge tasteless apartment full of clocks and lampshades, counting the dead girl's frocks, smelling her scent, finally passing out in the armchair under her portrait while the rain pours down outside the windowpanes. The use of music, too, is admirable : the one beautiful nostalgic tune used as a theme throughout ; distorted, when necessary, to convey a terrible menace—as, for instance, in the sequence outlined above.

All the films I have examined at length hint at elements implicit only, until now, in the foreign cinema : homosexuality in *The Maltese Falcon* ; sadism in *The Glass Key* ; individual greed exploited for political aims in *The Mask of Dimitrios* ; physical passion run riot in *Double Indemnity* ; necrophily and sexual impotence in *Laura*. Sophistication seems to be creeping, under the cloak of melodrama, into American films : it might even spread—one hopes—to this country. There are no signs, however, that this will be the case : the usual dreary spate of photographed plays and escapist musicals continues to pour *ad nauseam* from our studios. British film-companies had the chance of screening Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square*, a scathing exposure of petty drinking and whoring in Earl's Court pubs and Brighton hotels on the eve of war, which, if faithfully filmed, would have offered a topical commentary on a disintegrating society at a time when its nauseous fascist types are being enrolled as officers in the international police-forces of the future. Instead we allowed the story to be sold to Hollywood, where it has been filleted into a period-piece with the late Laird Cregar as a composer with homicidal instincts and chambers in Chelsea.

From America we are promised a screen-adaptation, by the director of *Double Indemnity*, of Charles Jackson's *The Lost Week End*, a vertiginous nightmare describing four days in the life of a dipsomaniac. From this it would appear indeed that a period of renaissance is under way in the States ; I look forward still to seeing Sidney Greenstreet in the title-rôle of Christopher Isherwood's *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* : perhaps even Faye Emerson as *Sally Bowles*. A film of Nigel Balchin's *Small Back Room* is announced for forthcoming production by a British company ; but given the theme—corruption and personal power-politics in the Civil Service sabotaging the war effort—I have no doubt that authority will intervene against a truthful adaptation.

Summing-up the effect of the films I have been discussing, I am left with a consciousness of the mirror held up by them to the darkness of

our times : whether intentional or not, the symbolism is there : *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Mask of Dimitrios*, especially, present a picture of greed and disintegration which might well be the world of modern diplomacy in microcosm ; the same impression, to a lesser degree, emanates from *The Glass Key*, though its politics are intended to be purely local. Even *Double Indemnity* and *Laura* make their point—in an age of so much licensed slaughter in equivocal causes, why not settle one's sexual problems with bullets instead of flowers ?

A quotation from the last page of the novel *The Mask of Dimitrio* seems to sum up the situation adequately :

'All I do know is that while might is right, while chaos and anarchy masquerade as order and enlightenment, these conditions will obtain.'



# THE OTHER ARTS

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## A Constable Sketch-Book

By C. H. PEACOCK

' *There is room enough for a natural painter.* The great vice of the present day is *bravura*, an attempt at something beyond the truth : in endeavouring to do something better than well they do what in reality is good for nothing. Fashion always had, and ever will have, its day ; but truth (in all things) only will last and can have just claims on posterity.'

So Constable wrote to his friend John Dunthorne in 1802, and to understand Constable one must never lose sight of this aim or the background that inspired it. For him there is only one truth in art : the truth of natural appearances. All his life he pursued this ideal, only occasionally allowing himself a lapse into theory and abstract principles. What he was trying to do may seem to us to-day enviably simple, but in the early nineteenth century it was revolutionary. Natural appearances were not then admitted to the drawing-room, and Constable, one feels, even when a Royal Academician, was never quite a drawing-room man. He was by birth and tradition a countryman, and his art was rooted in a blood attachment to the soil. What he expresses is his instinctive feeling for the unity which underlies the myriad details of nature. His is the farmer's eye which by long training can take in at a glance all the signs and portents of the land.

The Dutch, Constable once said, are a stay-at-home people, hence their originality. Of him it is true to say that he was a revolutionary inspired by what was homely and traditional. At his best he brings to his art the ordered rhythm of the countryside, the change and busyness which go with an intensive cultivation of the land. It is worth remembering that Constable was born and brought up in a corn-growing country where the river was an integral part of the farming system, a river made navigable by frequent locks and carrying horse-drawn barges laden with wheat or lime. It was a country of granaries and windmills, of harvesters and gleaners, ploughmen and waggoners. The landscape of East Anglia still retains its essential character, and to-day when the barges that Constable painted lie sunken and weed-grown in forgotten backwaters, the same succession of colour marks the cycle of the seasons. The shrill green of spring wheat matures to the darker tones of June ; the greens warm to ochre and deepen out to the full gold of ripened wheat. In this heavy soil the trees grow higher and produce a more

massive foliage ; and in the hottest summer the landscape seldom loses its first wealth of green.

The noting and understanding of such things was the basis of Constable's art. For him the deep tones of the Stour Valley were as influential in his artistic philosophy as the warm vibrant light of the *Midi* was in Renoir's. By a passionate attachment to the landscape he knew best, the painter in Constable was born. As he himself said : ' Painting is with me but another word for feeling, and I associate " my careless boyhood " with all that lies on the banks of the Stour ; those scenes made me a painter, and I am grateful.'

To-day his name is coupled with the subjects he most frequently chose to paint—the rainbow and the storm cloud wheeling in the summer sky ; mill-streams, farmhouses, navigable rivers ; landscapes rich in the emphatic play of light and shade. What tends to be forgotten is that Constable painted sea-pieces and painted them extremely well. In fact no English artist, with the possible exception of Bonington, ever handled them better. The other name that comes to mind is that of Turner ; but Turner, brilliant though he was in suggesting the movement of large masses of water, lost the subtleties of the sea through his habit of over-dramatizing. It needed Constable, the ' natural painter,' the careful observer of effects, to record the sea as it really was. What he shared with Turner was an instinctive feeling for ships, an ability to give them life ; and in his drawings especially, an eye for nautical detail. (Note the way he draws a pulley and suggests the strain or slackness in a rope.) Among the masterpieces of nineteenth-century painting is his sketch of Brighton Beach with colliers, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It is one of those paintings which by their freshness and vitality acquire the timelessness of great art. The rich blues of sky and sea take an added brilliance by contrast with the black coal ships lying off shore, and the beach glows with all the warmth of strong sunlight upon sand. Here again Constable shows himself a master of natural effect ; in this sketch every gradation of tone is the result of careful observation and nothing is put in or left out for the sake of conventional ' picture-making.'

It is no accident that his sea sketches are on the whole more atmospheric even than his landscapes. He is again merely recording the evidence of his eyes, for in the neighbourhood of the sea the reflection of light is greater and the rendering of it in paint necessitates the keying-up of the artist's palette. Constable's habit of keeping his eye consistently upon the object accounts for the distinctive quality of his sea painting. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, he never used the sea as a vehicle of drama. The sinking barque overwhelmed by mountainous waves, a subject beloved in all its variations by the fashionable world of the day, never had for him the slightest appeal.

He was content with the drama of the dew upon the grass and the changing tones of sky and sea.

The recent discovery of a sketch-book containing thirty-eight drawings by Constable, mostly beach scenes, throws a new emphasis on a little known aspect of his work. At every period of his life the sea had a profound attraction for him, and its influence on his art has not been fully measured. In its ever-changing form and colour it presented the supreme challenge, demanding from the painter the greatest technical skill, for in comparison with its evanescent effects, the painting of landscape was an almost simple matter. It may be said that from his first patient study of the sea Constable attained his wonderful mastery of light. We know that at an early date the marine artist, W. Van de Velde, exerted a strong influence on Constable and in some of his first shipping drawings Constable's homage to the Dutchman leads him into copying exactly seventeenth-century types of vessels. From Van de Velde Constable learned to paint luminous and sketchy skies; he learned also to give poise and movement to a ship, knowledge which he afterwards reinforced by careful studies of his own.

His first real contact with the sea seems to have been the trip he made from London to Deal by ship in 1803. 'I was near a month on board (he writes) and was much employed in making drawings of ships in all situations. I saw all sorts of weather. Some of the most delightful, and some as melancholy. But such is the enviable state of a painter that he finds delight in every dress nature can possibly assume.'

The main result of that sea voyage was a strengthening of Constable's draughtsmanship. The studies he made are mostly in pencil and show a Girtinesque line and emphasis. As a water-colourist he was still tentative, following in the main the eighteenth-century technique of outlines drawn in pen or pencil, with colour applied in neutral washes. In development his oil painting, under the influence of Gainsborough, Wilson and the Dutch masters, was far in advance of anything he could do in water-colour. He made in 1806 a journey to the Lake District and remained there for two months. That stay among the wild cold scenery of the North at the fag-end of the year did nothing directly to advance his art. Its effect on him was to precipitate a crisis which set him questioning the basis of his methods. Particularly was this true in the case of his water-colours. It was as if the impact of this unfamiliar scenery presented a challenge he was ill equipped to meet. Faced with a landscape which varied little from greens and browns, he began to model his style on Girtin, an artist whose subtle sense of tone gradation had solved the problem which Constable now had to face. This surrender to an earlier influence was tantamount to a confession of failure, and Constable

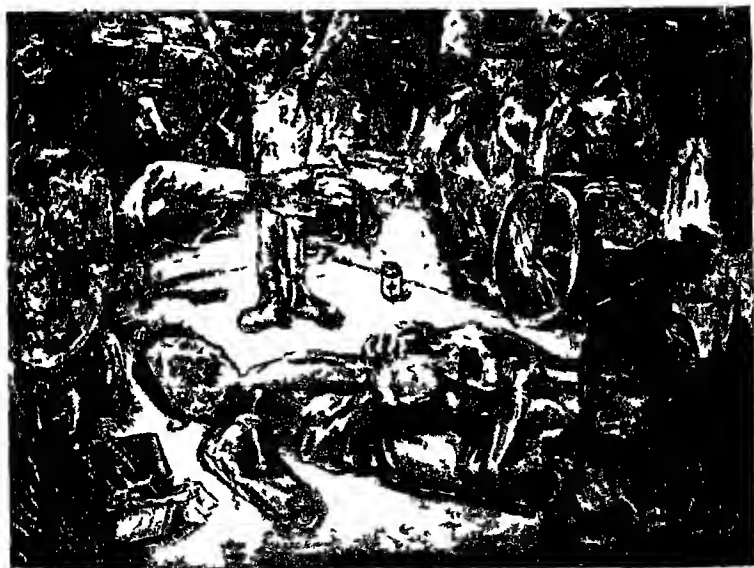




The low m...      p...      Three or four days  
 u...      l...      in 1917 on this ... waves it  
 it ... the waves



Сумник О кар Колоска



"What we are fighting for" Oskar Kokoschka,

himself seems fully to have realized that. His water-colours of this period, though broadly painted, are muddy and opaque in tone, suggesting that in this medium he was unable to combine speed of execution with clarity of palette.

In this newly-discovered sketch-book one sees Constable again absorbed in the problem of water-colour. These drawings constitute a series of laboratory experiments in which the artist, by a variety of methods, seeks to arrive at his result. It is the experimental nature of the work which accounts for the diverse style of the drawings and the frequent resort to annotation. Sir Kenneth Clark is undoubtedly right in dating the book at 1808 or 1809, pivotal years when Constable hovered between apprenticeship and maturity. (The drawings vary from the hesitant style of *The Lakes* to the fluent mastery of the later years.) In these sketches what is particularly apparent is the minute accuracy of the observations: it is Constable the scientist recording by every possible means the fleeting effects of nature.

That Constable should have made this series of coastal drawings a sort of trial ground for his methods is, I think, no mere chance. Throughout his life the sea was a formative influence with him. In 1824 he writes to his friend Archdeacon Fisher: '*The sketch-book I am busy with a few days when I will send it; they are all boats and coast scenes. Subjects of this sort seem to me more fit for execution than sentiment.*'

This last sentence must be read as a protest against the facile sea-scapes of such artists as Calcott and Collins who painted with an eye to giving the public what it wanted. In Constable's view marine painting was inferior in scope to landscape, yet his own work constantly disproves his theory. In his sea-scapes he shows a wonderful feeling for light and movement, with a modernity of handling which anticipates Boudin and Whistler. In this new sketch-book we see him fluctuating under the impact of various influences. He borrows occasionally the style of other artists, acknowledging in manner and technique his debt to the rising school of water-colourists. But throughout the book an inner unity is apparent: that combination of scientific observation with a passionate love of nature which is Constable's unique contribution to art.

In making a selection of drawings to reproduce I have chosen those which seem to me the best. Taken as a whole the book represents a series of experiments of varying success, and the fact that the last three pages contain what is undoubtedly the finest work is no indication that every drawing is a progressive step towards this final development. As an artist Constable remained all his life unpredictable. There is no straightforward line of development, but rather a series of paths which Constable was always liable to re-explore. His youthful work has sometimes all the mastery of the later years, and

at the end of his life he could quite easily drop back into what seems an earlier style.

The importance of this sketch-book is that it throws light on an obscure phase of Constable's career. For it is an artist's early work which tends to get lost or forgotten, and the artist himself may destroy in later years the things which seem to him only apprentice work. This kind of sifting out may account for the comparative lack of drawings of this particular period among the Constable collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Familiarity with the greater works may make us overlook the experiments and labour out of which they sprang. But Constable knew the difficulties he had faced. 'I long floundered in the path (he writes) and tottered on the threshold, and there never was any young man nearer being lost than myself . . .'

In his effort to achieve freshness of response he refused to bind himself to any rigid style. But behind the variations there remains the consistent core of sensibility, that personal view which in the case of genius amounts to vision.

## Oskar Kokoschka

By J. P. HODIN\*

### I

THE *Kunstschau* in Vienna in 1908, which was a landmark in the history of Central European modern painting, developed into a scandal. The young Oskar Kokoschka had exhibited in a special room his revolutionary art, which completely upset all contemporary æsthetic ideas. There were four monumental wall paintings, *The Dream-borne*, and in a glass show-case his poem, *The Dreaming Youths*, illustrated by himself: flowery poetry in which both East and West had their part and which had a new and challenging effect. Then there were other pictures, and the self-portrait in clay, a head with a gaping mouth, painted in the most vivid colours. The bourgeoisie came and were shocked, and there, too, were the intelligentsia, led by the prophetic Adolf Loos, the first modern architect of Central Europe, who had come from the Czech lands, like many leading cultural personalities of Vienna in those days before the first world war, such as the composer and conductor Gustav Mahler, Karl Kraus the moralist, critic and publisher of the 'Fackel,' Sigmund Freud and the art-historian

\* Dr. J. P. Hodin is a Czech author from Prague. He has written about the humanism of T. G. Masaryk, the Pansophism of J. A. Comenius, and Sigmund Freud's psychology of culture. Among his works on modern art the next, a monograph on the founder of modern Expressionism, the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, will appear shortly in London. Dr. Hodin is at present working on a book about Oskar Kokoschka, which deals with his life and work in the form of conversation.

Professor Dvůrák, with whom the history of art became a history of the human spirit. Kokoschka, too, is of Czech origin on his father's side ; on his mother's he is of Austrian and Celtic descent.

In order to understand how this art exhibition could arouse such excitement among so many people that it came to violence, one must realize that there was perhaps no town in Europe other than Paris which discussed so intensively the questions of the day and of art as the old Vienna. And like Paris, Vienna had produced an individual city culture the peculiar fascination of which was like a rainbow against the dark background of the coming night. It was in this *milieu* that Hermann Bahr and Peter Altenberg, Hoffmannsthal, Trakl, Schnitzler and Rilke wrote, that Egon Schiele painted and Adler and Jung explored the realms of psychology. The Nestoy tradition had only just come to an end and the tragic voice of Kainz died away from the Viennese Shakespearian stage, but already a new theatre had begun to grow up : Reinhardt, Moissi. In the melting-pot of cultures and races represented by Vienna, the coffee-house was the forum in which one passed or failed the crucial test. Kokoschka, too, passed through the 'purgatory' of the Vienna coffee-house, and he, the wonder child, was at that time guided by his Virgil, Adolf Loos. Adolf Loos was among the intellectuals who, on the occasion of the Viennese *Kunstschau* of 1908, attended the first performance of Kokoschka's play, *Murder, the Hope of Women*, and stood by Kokoschka in the tumult in which the police had to intervene. Already Kokoschka's poster for the performance, which was displayed throughout Vienna, had aroused great excitement. It was a 'Pietà,' the Madonna blood-red, with Kokoschka himself as Christ lying in her lap, white as chalk. And then the play itself: an expressionistic representation of the magic duel between Sun and Moon, the actors and musicians being ordinary members of the public, brought from the coffee-house. The orchestra—cymbals, drums, short and long pipes—shrill, seemingly incoherent and unintelligible, yet conforming to a higher unity. The actors read their parts during the play from scraps of paper ; Kokoschka had written them down at the last moment. 'I didn't write the play,' he said, 'I read it from the faces of those who became the principal actors. I composed everything out of the rhythm of their very breathing.' It was not till much later that Hindemith composed music for it.

From that day everyone in Vienna knew who Kokoschka was. He was hated and he was loved, and he himself hated and loved Vienna.' But with all the foolhardiness of his youthful vigour, he bore a deep wound in his breast. He pointed straight to this wound when he painted his generation in his portraits, in which his clear-sighted intuition laid bare, as by X-ray, the true face of modern man, man who was marked with death by his own technical progress.

Kokoschka said, looking back on that time : ' I felt quite intensely and suddenly as if man were stricken with an incurable disease.' To expose this was his duty as artist. That also set him free. His art was like the cry of a child, who suddenly awakes in a world of grown-ups, whose doings he does not understand, and who threaten his life. At that time he lived like a chrysalis ; he did not see clearly, as to-day, that mankind, because it thinks and feels only in ponderable and measurable terms, is not only lost to culture but represents an imminent danger to the whole survival of culture. In 1945 he wrote in London : " Modern portrait painting has become a difficult task—since the artist, who tries to make people see the human being, invisible in present-day man, is apt to make a fool of himself. Since society is at present a mathematical and bureaucratically conceived mass organization, we cannot hear the last bell toll, although the Apocalyptic Riders already shake heaven and earth. We do not mind the stench of the funeral pyre of our world. Since Humanism is dead, man is soulless, he no longer cares whether he lives or dies. The march of industrial civilization will be marked with utter ruin and destruction, like the path of the hordes which once invaded Europe. There will be no portrait left of modern man because he has lost face and is turning back towards the Jungle."

## II

Oskar Kokoschka's art was one of the chief influences of German Expressionism after the first world war. Expressionism as such is the art of meditative and introvert personalities. It is also a protest—against Impressionism and Aestheticism ; it restores the relationship between thought and vision, and is subjective. The fact that the Latin races stress the importance of form and *la belle matière* means that they incline less to Expressionism than other peoples. Expressionism, too, is almost exclusively outside the sphere of the French artist. Van Gogh is a Dutchman ; Chagall is an Eastern Jew, also Soutine ; Ensor is Flemish, only Roualt is French. There are few artists outside France who have reached an artistic standard which could hold its own beside the French. One of the chief among these is the Norwegian Edvard Munch. The expressionism of Munch represents a tragic viewpoint, austere in form, rhythmical, linear and poetical. Munch in the second half of the last century had set in motion in Central Europe a modern art which has ever since been fighting to preserve the balance between the classic painting of the West and the emphasis on Idea which became prevalent in the rest of Europe. The so-called ' German Expressionism ' came from the Norwegian Munch—though in his generation the young German painters under the leadership of Liebermann followed French Impressionism—and from Kokoschka. With Kokoschka there came

from Austria a melancholy Slav element—which saved him from a lapse into the doctrinaire art of the modern German painting—and a certain nervous quality which one might have called sceptical, if it had not displayed a sensitiveness which united in a single awareness the cultural characteristics of different times and peoples. German Expressionism—seen from the standpoint of these two foreign influences and of the influence of the colour-fauvism of the West, with the exception of Louis Corinth, is a chaotic movement rather than a true style, which remained amorphous and could never crystallize.

What does Expressionism mean for Kokoschka? Above all, it is a living force, but also a critical force. The basic feature of our view of life—so Kokoschka considers—is symbolism. One thing represents another; one simplifies, popularizes, generalizes, idealizes—but one forgets that that which is thus created is no reality. Slogans are substituted for reality. Two generations ago this was not dangerous—to-day it is fateful. Symbolism needs ideologies and words; culture, however, needs shape and form. A fantasy is only creative which can produce characters like Antæus, Narcissus, Jacob, Hamlet, Faust, Tartuffe, Don Quixote, Chichikov. Or in painting images such as those of El Greco, Rembrandt, Brueghel, Hieronymus Bosch. In a world ever more hostile to the spirit, from which no way of escape seemed open—as it was still for Gauguin—there was for Kokoschka only one possibility, namely to cling to the roots which the artist possesses in himself. These gave nourishment to a world of visions to which Kokoschka trustfully and unreservedly surrendered himself. In 1911 he gave a lecture about the nature of the images which are the key to his philosophy. Here, in a complex, baroque style, he suggested the significance of the images, the visions, which are forms and not abstractions: 'The determining feature of life, its essence, is the consciousness of the image. Consciousness is the cause of all things, even of ideas. It is a sea whose horizons are images. Consciousness of images is not a condition in which we recognize or comprehend things, but a state in which consciousness experiences itself.'

The perception of images is Kokoschka's creed about the creative power of mankind. Philosophically, it corresponds to the idealistic conception of Berkeley. The living source from which the myth-creating, beauty-seeking religious power of the soul pours out found in Kokoschka one of its last prophets. For that reason, too, he is not so much concerned with the final result, that a picture should be finished, but with the painting itself, with the creative process. Years can go by during which he may alter a picture in ways not dictated by a formal standpoint, but which grow out of the need to approximate more closely to the intensity of his inner vision, painting it to live it anew.

Kokoschka says: 'As long as I could retain an image, I lived

by it. I know I lack this power more and more as time goes on. That is why I am so egocentric, because I am compelled to protect myself against a hostile world by withdrawing within myself. There before me is a figure which I have not seen for thirty years. It has the same fascination for me as before, indeed it is more vivid than the present moment. What is this fascination? Behind it there is a hidden force. It is something different from an intellectual process. I can never learn anything. Everything I ever learnt I must forget. Otherwise I should only be copying myself and that would be death. But when this force grips me, all is well. When it leaves me I am empty. That is why I have not had a slow, sure success, but ups and downs, like the ebb and flow of a tide. I could never bring myself to attempt anything deliberately, in cold blood; I should be filled with terror. It is the same as in love. As the image is dependent on me, so am I on it. I have to await the call—and then I must not fail. . . .’

From this primal source Kokoschka created his work, which is to-day like a mighty tree with broad, strong branches. He expressed in drama what could not be conveyed with the brush (*The Burning Bush, Job, Orpheus and Eurydice, Comenius or the Tragedy of Humanism*) and in graphic art what great music called forth in him.

### III

The more closely one investigates the life and work of Kokoschka, the more clearly it appears that the subjective world of his art and the objective world surrounding him—the man-made world of technical, material progress and of spiritual decay—more and more tend to part company, so that there appears a schizophrenic element, a cleavage between the spirit and the material, which is significant of the experience of the last generations. Yet, just as man does not only do things consciously but also as part of nature and therefore subconsciously, impelled by instinct, so, too, in Kokoschka the cleavage does not result in an incurable sickness. Like the positive and negative of an electric current, the conflicting visions give life to each other in his fantasy. The product of both these energies, their synthesis, is the series of political pictures of the humanist, Kokoschka, which he painted in the years of his exile in England.

In the first world war Kokoschka, an officer in the Austrian Army, escaped death by a miracle. A Russian bayonet pierced his breast and grazed the pericardium. He lay bleeding to death on the battlefield. Visions of intense power and unearthly beauty appeared before the inner eye of the artist. For some years after the war his spiritual equilibrium was upset; he was poised, like Edvard Munch at the time of his great crisis in Copenhagen, on a tight-rope between



life and death, dream-world and reality. Nearly all the great painters of modern times have been saints and martyrs of their art.

What a strange light is thrown on the spiritual composition of modern society by Van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne! Kokoschka found himself again. The colours of his pictures became clear, intense and blooming (in the French sense), his inner vision became deeper and more intelligible (in the mode of H. Bosch, Brueghel and the Japanese). He threw himself once more into the great adventure of life and art, he abandoned his post as professor in the Dresden Academy of Art, and escaped to Africa, to Paris, to Italy, to Switzerland, to Holland, to Austria, to Spain. In the years between the two world wars he became more and more conscious of a mission. Following in the footsteps of the Czech philosopher and educator, John Amos Comenius, he took up the thankless task of combating the onslaught of brutal nationalism. When the Viennese wanted to install him as director of the School of Industrial Art, in which he himself had been a pupil, he made a condition of his acceptance the reform, in a humanistic sense, of the Austrian public schools. He received no answer. In countless articles, in speeches, in prefaces, he fought during these years for the great ideals of mankind, for the deliverance of men through education. Kokoschka was one of the thirty members of the Prussian Academy of Science and Art. He resigned his membership as a protest against the dismissal of Käthe Kollwitz and Liebermann. He left Germany, then Austria. He gave up his Austrian nationality as a protest against the official recognition of the 'Anschluss' in Washington and London. With a Czechoslovak passport he fights openly to-day, as Comenius did in his time, as a European for his creed: *Cosmopoliti sumus omnes, ejusdem mundi cives*. In Prague he stood for years by the statesman who was one of the finest men of this lost generation, T. G. Masaryk. The picture which he painted of him is dialectic. The whole of Masaryk's philosophy, which ethically was built on that of Comenius, is represented there, as he had at one time briefly outlined it to Kokoschka: 'The realization of an international democratic school front against hate, chauvinism and bloodshed would be the crowning of my ideas.'

What are the basic ideas of Kokoschka's educational programme? Starting from the assumption that our present crisis, which has seemed incurable ever since the first world war, is due to the misguidance of the masses, he declared at the Pen Club meeting in Prague in 1936: 'The origin of the mental crisis is a disease of the human soul, of man disbelieving in the ethics of his work and incapable of giving, finding, or performing work. This would indicate that the incapacity to work must necessarily lead to war, for useful social work needs peace.' For Kokoschka the greatest revolution of mankind against tyranny and barbarism was not the storming of the Bastille, but the recognition

in principle of the work of John Amos Comenius during the age of enlightenment and its gradual practical application, enforced after 1848 by law—the common, free and obligatory elementary school.

‘The elementary school as an image of adult life must convey activity and in accordance with the intention of its inventor must be above all a school of work. Since in our time society has lost the creative faculty, since human society has sunk to barbarism, the education of the five senses will bring back to man his natural talent of observation and the faculty of using his observations in a rational way. It will enable him to work with a reasonable conception according to a plan which furthers his own happiness and at the same time that of the greater social unit, humanity.’

‘The development of an elementary school for town and country alike which permits of no more double-tongued morality, in which “Thou shalt not kill” is taught in word and spirit as the first commandment of humanity, and war is condemned as a sin against reason, that will be the best contribution to the creation of a democratic united front against the terror of any group which under this or that pretext of predestination separates itself from the organism of people to enforce its own morality against all reason.’

#### IV

The present crisis is destroying the old culture. How could it come to this? ‘The eye,’ says Kokoschka, ‘is like a hand. It grasps some things and ignores others. The eye has its own language. The sense of sight is a deep instinct which is not merely an optical stimulus. This language is worthy of the same respect as word-language. The eye is not only an optical instrument. It has an age-long experience, its own philosophy and metaphysics. It is like a brain. Man has developed round it: it has accumulated its own tradition from the time of the caveman. Man could see before he could speak. Women speak in gestures, they are conservative and retain the best. Everywhere children, too, speak with their hands. Since the Reformation the link with nature has been undermined, the way to life cut off. Rationalism. The Renaissance had still a means of communication through sight, since then logical intercourse has dominated. Through logic one can prove much, even that green is red. Logic is the oldest conjuror’s trick to control the people. Behind logic stands the police.’

Logical thought, modern militarism, technology and material development all form a causal sequence. Where is the way of escape from chaos which man calls progress? Is there a possibility of progress, an escape from spiritual darkness?

Kokoschka says: ‘A long period of desert will come, a long period of sterility, after the present outbreak of satanism. In life there is no

progress. But there is a substance of life, a vital power, it appears to me like a great earthworm—behind several parts die off, in front new ones grow. It remains the same organism. . . .

'Because I am a mystic I need no saints. I am against the legends of great men. There are greater times, lesser times. There are artists. I do not understand politicians. People have wanted to convert me to a belief in progress. Do you remember in Goethe's *Faust* where Faust turns to the Mothers in his search for the secret of life? The maternal side of life is a reality, not an idea. I believe in this at least as strongly as the Chinese. In the period of spiritual drought which is coming the essential values will survive in spite of all, and then will come the future. It will follow the same pattern as the myths. . . .

'I am no defeatist, no optimist, no pessimist. That which I know is something which I see, like a stone falling, like stars gleaming. If I think a little further and ask myself: Why then do I commit follies, why do I squander my lifetime painting? Then I can say to you: When I am painting I am in the midst of something living. So true, so concrete can the spirit be. It finds its form in æsthetic realization. In the Upanishads there is a passage which runs: the painted form is a spirit in the hierarchy of the world of phenomena: the Maya. It has form and body and life.'



## The Place and the Person

By HENRY REED

THE place not worth describing, but like every empty place.  
 So much like other empty places, you yourself  
 Must paint its picture, who have your own such places,  
 Which lie, their whitening eyes turned upwards to the sky,  
 On the remoter side of a continent,  
 Under a burning sun. Their streets and hovels  
 Have lost all memory, and their harbours rot.  
 Paint it, and vary it as you like, but only  
 Always paint this: the solitary figure,  
 Who lies or squats or sits, facing the sun,  
 Now in bewilderment or a vacant calm,  
 In filthy rags, the ancient garb of exiles,  
 The casual mixture of others' memories,  
 Legacy or theft; and the mind perplexed and eroded.

In such a one, at the edge of his world, desire  
 Is buried or burned in lust, and love is banished  
 Beyond the creeping jungle ; in the noontime heat,  
 Since even these can be lost, they are far away.  
 You will know all this, and can paint it as suits you best,  
 But paint alone the central figure faithfully ;  
 His surroundings do not matter ; they are yours or mine,  
 The walls perhaps with graying notices  
 Of the bygone sales of heifers, or the concourse  
 Of a troupe of vanished singers, singing there,  
 The carrion birds shuffling upon the roof,  
 The empty expanse of ocean confronting him,  
 The harbour steps, the empty sands below,  
 And the movement of water on the harbour bar.

And from the emptiness, still mute but moving,  
 Emerge the dancers who will not be still.  
 Nearest at hand two scuffling figures, who  
 Saunter a little and scuffle again and dance,  
 Or lie on the paving-stones and yawn at each other,  
 A daily ritual ; if not with them, with others.  
 This is a dance, with ritual and celebration.  
 Others join in its windings as the day  
 Passes through noon and afternoon and evening  
 And wave on wave of heat and sunlight fall,  
 Illuminating and transfixing, and at last  
 The dreadful pattern of their lives disclosing.  
 From out of rocks and paths they come, the dancers ;  
 One who walks solitary and shuns the gaze  
 Of the scuffling pair, now languid in the heat,  
 Until, withdrawn, he looks about and secretly  
 Seizing a dead shark's jawbone out of air,  
 Makes it a trap with stones and vegetation  
 For yet another who walks on the level beaches.  
 They congregate, beseeching or resentful,  
 Till the empty place is crowded with silent ghosts.  
 They are intangible, but he is one with them,  
 As with their proud, vindictive admonitions,  
 And sensual taunts, and gestures of possession,  
 They separate, part, return, link arms again,  
 Familiarly, yet not with reconciliation.  
 And, one with them, he cannot turn away,  
 Or forget in the motions of song and prayer and dance  
 The great dried fountains of their sombre eyes.  
 They are here and not here, sometimes all of them here,

And sometimes only an insistent couple,  
 Who do not go away, but repeat their figure,  
 And sing again and again their wordless song,  
 And pray their speechless prayer. The hours pass,  
 And it is still high noon: they are here and not here,  
 And a voice with no speaking murmurs into the air:  
 'You have prayed too much, and in mid-prayer have grown ill  
 And faltered there. You have sung too much,  
 And the song has travelled an echoing wall and returned;  
 Have danced too much and in the dancing figures  
 Have faltered there; and have too often chosen  
 The rituals of despair and joy, and faltered.  
 Have danced, prayed, sung: but have not wept enough.'

All yields. The wooden buildings by the shore  
 Split in the heat. The blackened sand  
 Cracks into arid chasms and fissures, crumbles.  
 The vegetation shrivels, seeds from the chattering pod  
 Fall in the dirt. But the untouchable stone  
 Which cannot weep, refracts the light and glitters  
*And cannot turn or yield, but suffers and endures.*  
 Weeping and yielding, they are far away.  
 The sun and the man in closed encounter stand  
 And neither conquers. Only a burst of rain  
 Could fall between them, make these burning stones  
 Places for hands and feet; only a wind  
 Fall and unlock their embrace. And so he mutters:  
 'Give me a wind; or give me a burst of rain.  
 The sun will not yield, being unconquerable.  
 And how can I yield, who wander and only find  
 No one to whom defeat may be confessed?'

His own words lure him: and 'Alas,' he murmurs:  
 'What do these comings and goings profit me,  
 Pains and adventures among foreign races,  
 The languages I cram my brain with, and  
 The ill-speakable? What shall I do with these  
 If after many years they do not lead me  
 One day to rest in a place where I may say  
 This pleases me, and here I may remain?  
 What do these comings and goings profit me,  
 These instruments I finger and re-learn,  
 These books whose pages blind me in the sun,  
 And, worse than all, the howling conversations  
 Which without cease construct themselves within me,

Disposing guilt for every suffered pain,  
 On all my journeys whe:soever I go ;  
 And what are foreign tongues, for, but to choke  
 My mouth with references to former travellers,  
 Who have gone this way, or such ways, long before ? '

There is no reply ; the dancers for once have chosen  
 To withdraw themselves, and the beaches are really bare.  
 And beyond the beaches the other vision rises  
 Which is their counterpart and their negation.  
 From the far horizon, and breaking in triumph towards him,  
 A ship comes forth, with supernatural haste  
 Parting the waters ; and with grace the waves  
 Draw from her painted sides. Seductively  
 She flourishes her dazzling burden of sails  
 Which without wind or tide approach the harbour.  
 He sees her, and rises and cries, ' Again, again !  
 This ship will go tomorrow, and I shall go with it ! '  
 And to the empty hovels he turns, but the dancers  
 Do not emerge, and their movements cannot be heard.  
 He calls to them : ' This ship will go tomorrow.  
 And if I am in your debt, to whatever degree,  
 Tell me at once, for I depart tomorrow.  
 I shall not wait for the unreturning vessels  
 Of you who dance your dances on this shore.  
 This is my ship ; its name I do not know.  
 And since, if you ask the first dog in the street,  
 It will know enough to tell you I am helpless,  
 Am impotent and wretched, and can do little or nothing,  
 And least of all for myself, do me this final act,  
 Who have never done me anything so gentle :  
 Find me the time of this golden ship's departure,  
 For, paralysed, I wish most earnestly to get  
 Early on board. Find me and tell me when. '

The ship draws closer, triumphant and unconcerned,  
 Unpiloted, and with the deliverer's smile,  
 And confidently cargoed with a love  
 That has broken through virgin seas to seek and find him,  
 Wherefore it gleams more brightly, wherefore it glitters.  
 The ropes are quickly thrown to where the harbour  
 Gladly receives them; the gang-planks quickly descend  
 And women in green and purple come from the deck  
 Descend to the jetty, bearing a burden of oil,  
 And some with flowers, and all of these they dispose

Close to his feet, and withdraw. The ship fills the harbour,  
And to the ship they return. It gleams more brightly,  
And its gleam is the gleam of yet another deception.  
For look, the sails, their powerful and striding canvas,  
And the riding fortress of timber which is the hull,  
Are changing there in the sunlight, undone and mastered  
As all is undone and mastered that comes this way ;  
Dislimning, falling, dissolving, canvas to satin,  
Satin to sunlight turning, wood to paper,  
The masts to cobwebs, women to wraith and phantom,  
Failing mirage of the noontime, sunlight to sea,  
Cobweb and satin to sunlight, sunlight to sun,  
The empty harbour an unattended altar  
For the barren, unblest marriage of sun and sea.

Fed on such visions, how shall a man recover  
Between the dancing dream and the dream of departure ?  
For the dancers go, and their silent song and prayer  
Go with them ; and the ship goes from the harbour,  
Vanishes in sea, or drowns in air, but goes.  
The waves of noon can barely reach the shore,  
And the jungle approaches always a little nearer.  
This is the captive. And paint him as you will.  
These are my images. The place not worth describing.

## Jug and Well

PERCY COATES

### I

THE miner lay in his bed and stared out to scenes strangely familiar. Down the valley he could see the remote dark buildings of Chesterfield. The old crooked spire seemed to writhe against risen moorlands, but between were green fields, and in the hollows, the stream Rother flowing softly toward the town. It was like mirage. Because the month was July there were cornfields in yellow shapes : and the thick, dark plantations threw whole villages into shadow. Black smoke from unseen collieries was rising and curling in the air to drift across the sky and dissipate over far blue hills. He could put a name to every one of these pits . . . and yet it all seemed like fantasy.

Below, quite near, was the railway cutting fringed with purple flowers, and beyond this the familiar pit yard. He could read the inscriptions on the wagons. A few had travelled miles across country,

word and he would give it up. His mind went back to the interview down there in the office : she was right, 'they' had stroked him, played him skilfully—if she would only say one word. But she remained averted, and he also had his pride.

He walked out with set face. But she could watch him all the way to the pit from this parlour window. And there he went, a tall powerful figure, holding to the fence until he reached the bridge and leapt strides up the gantry, to fill the door for a second and disappear. Well, he was gone. Into the valley of the shadow, as her mind put it. For she was alien to this life, and the dark pit was her enemy : if he returned safely, then it was miracle. She laid her face to the cool glass waiting for the wheels to turn. And now they were twinkling against the sky ; until the spokes blurred and they were solid dark rings. He was descending and there was nothing for her to 'do but wait. Through the long hours that hovered like ravens' wings.'

### III

And he was staring through the bars to slimed brick that seemed to flow in torrents. His lamps threw a fitful gleam over yellow ochre that dripped from the circular walls. It was weird to ride the chair alone : no body-huddle, no wind-blown repartee, just the guide ropes screaming, and the puff of air momentary as a sigh when the cages passed. In the bottom he said, 'Good-day !' to the onsetter who eyed him over, jangled the bells, and walked off without a word into the deeper shadows behind the shaft. He stood for minutes, in that green diffusion of light, listening to the subtle whispers in the hollow well that told him surface was near. But finally he turned away, skirting the brick-built bulge of a second shaft, to the inspection station where a deputy sat filling in reports. The man looked up and said :

"So thou'st landed . . ." He blew breath into the flare lamp, tested with his fingers the lock of a small electric, peered into the miner's face, and went on : 'I hanna managed t' find thee a mate, yet.'

Here was escape. Well, it was honourable escape because a man should never work alone. Very near was sun and sweet air, and she would be there, happy at his return. She would laugh and light his cigarette . . . already his lungs craved the warmth of cigarette smoke.

'Then, it's no use !'

'Happen one o' th' others ull ha'e a man t' spare. Could'st thou be walkin' on ?'

There it was : as if the whole world depended on his answer. Why should it be so ? Even if they were related there were other men. He stared down at his feet.



'Thou'lt be doing us a good turn.'

That was how they bent a man's will : if force could not do they simply used insinuation. He knew what he should do . . . walk away to the shaft, haul the onsetter from out his cosy nest, curse him for his incivility, and fly topsides. Instead he found himself traversing the main level, leaving behind him home and hope and day-shine. Ahead were tiny stars that winked low down. Lamps carried by other men setting out for other special tasks. But let them go—they would be talking pigeons, dogs, maybe tragedy, and he wanted naught o' that. And so he slowed his pace until he reached the junction with its tangled skein of rail laid out in glittering curve. He turned left, away from the silver sheen. And presently his own lamps sparked out revealing rock walls grey and solid, dust at his feet a darker grey glittering like frost : the shadows on the walls in a grotesque dance. Now he was isolated, only his thoughts for company. And they were bitter like gall. The word insurance sticking in his throat. To beg like a cripple at a gate . . . sixpence a week and you can die nicely. It was unthinkable—almost. He was young, strong in his pride, a first-class collier : and yet it might come to that. Because of her. Well, it was an old, old story . . .

They had met in Nottingham. It was a trip and he had wandered away from his mates to explore this sparkling city. The streets were packed with wenches, so many, floating as if on air, flashing out of nothing to disappear gay like butterflies. He remembered how he walked along sniffing this atmosphere full of strange scents, gazing in at all the gaudy things on display. The soft gurgling laughter enchanted him. Until he came to a tobacco kiosk, a low long place heavy with aromatic fragrance. Like a shrine among these tall buildings. And there she was . . . a priestess with shining bronzed air to minister to his needs. You might call it love at first sight : but after that he could not keep away from Nottingham. Every week-end found him there . . . and she would lead him to park grounds beside the river Trent, where they could sit and watch the silver flow of water. Talk, discovering each other, while they gazed out over distant smudged houses to the green fields beyond ; over a thin bright strip of canal to where the hills lifted in a blue haze to the peaks of his own county.

But—insurance !

He lost the thread of these reminiscences when he came to the working district . . . where coal is won. The quality of travel had deteriorated rapidly, and now he must stoop low, slide his back under these sagging bars, the wind behind him blowing strongly through this bottle-neck. It dragged along a thin curtain of dust that filmed his face. Mice were squeaking in the pack walls. Excited because of this visitation ; because their keen noses smelled out the

food passing by in a tantalizing aroma. Either side were galleries carrying a single gauge of rail straight to the gleaming wall of mineral. These dark, blank entrances were draped with sheets of black brattice that gave off the smell of creosote in all its pungency. Through this brattice, a few hours ago, the stretcher had forced its way.

Onward . . . perhaps fifty yards, and he was there : throwing off these sweat-heavy clothes, to crouch in a semi-nude state and rub away the moisture with edged palms. The chock on which he hung his clothes was distorted under weight, the timbers already touched with white mould. His tools were still locked in their chains. He knelt to unearth the sharpened blades buried deep in a rock grave. He must gear up his pick.

A glance at the plans hanging there on the pit brow would show you instantly how the scheme of galleries hereabouts was exactly like the symbol trine. The spear-point biting deeply into earth, and that was the main head thirty yards away and straight on. To reach his working place he must climb the short bar and turn left, walk along the line of gallery that should complete the triangle. But here was the snag. A fall of ground had blocked the passage. His lamps flashed on the grey face of fallen rock. He knew that it was yards through. It was his task by sheer point of pick to cut around the obstacle always keeping to the seam of coal. He, or some other, must eventually find the gallery beyond : well, it was a man-size job—fit for a pickman.

He hooked his lamps to a prop, knelt, and began the process of slotting. Limbering up for the long ordeal. This rhythmic, familiar exertion lulled his mind : the surface thoughts faded and he became the automaton, cutting, flashing his arms, cracking at the dark wall. Thus for a while, until he heard the sound of heavy, rapid foot-falls. It was sudden and startling, so that his heart leapt. He thought of the promised mate and was soothed. It was, however, the deputy who came crouching, to say :

‘I canna get thee a man.’

Here again was the golden voice of opportunity whispering home, bright light and soft sweet air.

‘Wey’ve tried iverywheer,’ the deputy was saying, ‘even sent out t’ th’ village . . . but nowt. An’ they want thee t’ carry on if thou wilt.’

The dream was fading.

‘They’ll ha’e t’ pay ——’ fiercely, because he could think of nothing more adequate.

‘I’ll see t’ that. Dun forget thou’rt doin’ me a favour’s well.’

‘That’s why —’

‘An’ I s’all none forget it !’

Blood is thicker than water, and the deputy touched the miners,

shoulder, feeling the firm, warm flesh : between them this strong bond. But he was the official also, must issue the warning, give instruction.

'Yon headin's full o' gas,' he said, 'chock-full. An' if thou should happen t' thurl through, thou mun pack up straight away. Wey on'y need a little hole—just t' let it seep off.'

'That means wey've gotten two fences on th' district ——' the miner suggested.

'One i' th' straight . . . an' thon other down th' wall.'

'Hey hed a big family—'tis they who'll feel th' pinch !'

But the deputy balked at this. 'Accidents ull happen,' he said. 'But I ha'e t' go round an' examine. I'll be back wi' thee later an' wey'll spend th' rest o' th' shift together.'

'So long, then !'

Squatted on his heels the miner watched the golden flame turn to a speck and fade out. Down that runway, not so far away, was the first fence. He knew how it would be : just a cross of timber built to the roof, marked palely with chalk : NO ROAD. A clear warning that whatsoever lay beyond must remain inviolate.

At last he tore away and returned to the task. Absorbed, his strokes became longer and the light gleaming on his back showed how the muscles were taking punishment. Writhing like snakes as he swayed in that meditative Buddha position everything flowing from the loins. Because the mechanism was running loosely his mind was free to wander. It travelled down the long, dark corridors, flashed to the surface, and centralized on her. She was drooping in the village like a rare flower on a miasmic slag heap. Whenever he donned his pit clothes her face assumed that look. But for him to leave the valley where he was born : to tread city streets and know that yon great wheels were turning, that the stream Rother was still unwinding its silver braid through green fields and tinted woods ; to walk along the hot metallic pavements and dream of cool scented places in the woods where bodies could lie invisible among dark fern, where there were beds of hyacinth bluer than the skies . . . well, it was like death. And yet from this death would spring a new life for her. How ominous was the word death—short and sharp like a dagger. Suddenly he was longing for the shift to end. She would be there, waiting, her face pressed to the window. Watching as he leapt the gantry, walked over the red ash path near the fence. Ah—the fence. NO ROAD !

He was surprised to find that his pick was idle, laid across his thighs ; that he was half turned staring into purple shadow. It was his fancy, but those shadows seemed heavier, almost tangible forming into shapes. But all colliers were fanciful : it was the blood in their veins, the mystery of the dark pit. And how they talked—lordy,

lordy, how they talked. There was a wry twist to his mouth as he averted his body and once more attacked the barrier of coal. He was ashamed to feel this tiny canker of fear gnaw at his bowels. And now he used the long handle, savagely because of this unease, toiling on until his face and chest were pitted with the flying fragments.

What did they not say?

Using short stabbing blows he cut a small hole in the block of coal, inserted a long polished wedge, first wetting the tip with his tongue, and hammered it home to the blurred head. The shining surface cracked and split, finally to disintegrate. A small fall of soft coal fell around his knees. They said —

That the souls of all the men who die in the pit never can be free. They must roam the galleries, driven; must take a hand, ply a ghostly pick: when the face was quiet, deserted, must exercise in a supernatural craftsmanship. Well, it was daft talk . . . but, of course, colliers were fanciful.

And now he dare not turn. The long meandering runway lay behind him passing through all these dark deserted working places, a thousand yards of it to the shaft side. But he dare not look back. Crouched in the corner his dappled body shone as if it were oiled. A fine mist of sweat and dust played around the lamps, silver and gold, to show iridescent against the glass. He toiled on, striking heavily, and still the wall held to its obduracy, and finally the blade lost its point and would do no more.

He was out on the level under the chock, the rails glistening between his knees, cool wind touching his body mopping up the sweat . . . but with no recollection of the move. He draped clothes across his shoulders, reached for a bottle and drank deeply: and at once his skin returned the draught for ease. Bread was bitter in his mouth, but he forced it down. It was all like a queer dream. He remained so for many minutes, crouched in that strange collier posture, his ears tuned to catch the slightest chancy sound. But nothing. Only the sough of wind, the rustling shadows, and the constant shift and rumble of ground as the roof pressed in. But air must flow . . . and he must get back to that corner. Slowly he unwound the cord from his bundle of blades.

#### IV

The deputy, meanwhile, far advanced on his tour of inspection was nearing the first fence. He had tramped these galleries, crawled along the face thrusting through low, narrow places like rat holes, always keeping in mind that here timber was bursting, that in this stall and the next were every signs of impending falls. In high places he lifted his flame lamp in a delicate, tentative manner seeking for traces of gas. Now he was face to face with the frail

palisade that bore the significant inscription : NO ROAD. The wind was making moan through the spaces between the bars. It moved sluggishly burdened with a taint of mould, fug of mice, and the exhalation from a myriad tiny jets. It whispered over this welter of grey rock, the fallen glittering leaves of mineral . . . touching with soft fingers the place that must not be disturbed.

He was a compact man : hard and serious because the weight of responsibility fell heavily on his shoulders. He knew a great deal, had seen much, and no caprice of this dark froward pit could surprise him or throw him off his balance. Not for long, anyway. And so, quite coolly, he could stare at the scene and reconstruct the night's drama : Grand Guignol in one swift act of guillotine. But another's worry. For his part, there were the fences, the gas-fast stall, and a man on' the district, a kinsman, working alone against the rules cutting 'through to danger. Well, it was plenty.

He looked his fill, turned away, and was almost down. Under his feet partly covered with dust was a pick ; a pick in gear, the cotter fitting snugly to its blade. He crouched to it, there in the middle of the runway, feeling for the initials he knew would be etched in a blue-steel socket. The polished wooden haft was smooth as glass. And so he squatted, his lamp throwing a thin mask of gold across his face while he mused over this epitaph to a dead miner. The handle slipped through his hands like a living thing . . . where, then, was the owner ? Overhead the roof lowered sullenly, and the seam of coal beside him rolled away like a dark river. But the pick ? Best to put it safely with the other tools down yon at the foot of the gate. But first he must knock out the blade—draw its sting, so to speak. A simple operation . . . one crisp blow.

But the effect was extraordinary.

In that confined space it went off like the crack of a pistol shot. Waves of sound went ringing along the gallery to impinge dreadfully on the miner's brain. He was crouched under the mouldering chock, pick in hand. A second before he had smashed home the cotter and this was the fearful response.

' It was, I tell you—it was—' the voice, weird in its plangency, was his own.

He waited. His body taut in an acute catalepsy. His eyes turned backward down the level were the colour of ash. Every shadow held menace, and he strained to meet it with a terrible effort. For eternities it seemed—but nothing. No sound but the wind sighing, the creep of weighting earth. Until he gathered all his forces, lifted from the crouch, and went back to his corner strutting in the manner of a sleep-walker. Air must flow ! That was a fixed purpose. . . . He stared back once, wide-eyed, into the shadows. Then he attacked the dead, blank wall before him. Sixpence a week and you can die

nically. . . . He did not know it, but he was cracking furiously at the coal. So that sweat streamed down his face, dripping to the black dust. They said—what did they not say—that the man had been decapitated, and yet the arms worked on. It was a frightful vision. There was a taste of salt in his mouth, and in his mind distorted flashing pictures out of all he had lived through. Because in this dark corner he would die—he was sure of that. From the corner of his eye he could see his own grotesque shadow, grey on the dark river. And the pictures blurred and became fantastic. He turned his body in such a way that he could toil on and still stare down the long gloomy corridor toward the fence. He was certain that death, in some guise or other, was drawing near.

When at last the first faint sound of feet dragging in the dust came to him, he sighed heavily, placed his pick carefully across his thighs, bowed his head to the smooth cool mineral . . . and waited patiently for the end.

## V

When the deputy turned in from the gate everything in the gallery seemed normal. He could see a star twinkle of light from the electric, and the flame-lamp was burning clear like a marigold. The dark shape of the miner crouched to the corner. Drawing nearer, however, he noticed that the body was posed unnaturally. He could hear the man talking, a gabble of words : and the first qualms touched his bowels. He hastened his steps, feet making a hollow sound, and touched the wet gleaming shoulder. And at once the whole coherence of flesh and limb fell apart, to sprawl among dust and shards of loose coal, flat and wide like a starfish.

‘Hey, lad, what’s amiss?’

But no answer—only that heavy stertorous breathing.

The deputy stared swiftly at the roof, at the lamps ; but no break, not a trace of gas. The man had been stricken : but it was with something out of all knowledge. He looked at the man again. He knew what he must do. Drag that fourteen stone of flesh and bone out to the level, the skin wet and slippery, backward down the gate, inert limbs trailing dismally over rock, over sleeper ends ; down to the chock where the legs could be disposed carefully, arms folded, and every ounce of cloth piled on the quivering body. For extra weight he stripped himself of shirt and vest and stood there in the wind feeling strangely vulnerable. But it was pitiful to hear the distressed lungs labour.

It was a fix—but he must face it. His mind began to race, until he clamped it down firmly. Distant a thousand yards was the shaft side, nothing nearer, and yet the man could die while he chased off seeking help. There was the district telephone. But that was hemmed in, beyond the fence, toward the main head. He was

ringed around with prohibition. He broke down for a while, cursing the pit and all its works. Up yon, 'they' would be comfortable enough, sitting in their posh chairs scratching a pen over paper. Signing some other's death warrant. Well, it was easy. He found himself drifting toward the fence. The same cruciform structure in props and bars, differing from the other only in purpose. He stared at the pale lettering, NO ROAD, beyond it into darkness and the mystery of death, and it was agony to hear a sobbing moan of breath borne to him on the wind, and know that so near was help. That box of steel into which he could cry—help !

He was through !

And now his bitterness was sloughed. In his mind one clear purpose which he would follow no matter where it led. His brain was coiled. He remembered clearly how the telephone stood fixed to a prop in the refuge hole. It was near, no more than twenty yards : and whenever a fence is built always allowed is that margin, for spread, for safety. Gas was an old, old enemy. He knew exactly how to face up to it. He pricked down the wick of his flame lamp until it showed as the merest spot of gold. In that infinitesimal speck lay all his hopes, his salvation. He moved forward slowly. His eyes fixed firmly to that tiny pulsing flame. He knew that his kind of death would show as a film of blue, like a tiny rift in dark clouds, a lovely shape perfect in its geometrical triangle hovering delicately above the gold. But forward, his fingers like filaments seeking for the break in that rough wall of stone. And suddenly the beating of his heart told him that it was there. Blue mist seeping through the gauze. He gave ground stealthily—to sink on his heels, stare into the clear glass cylinder. But that was a mere festive lunge. Here the gold was free, unblemished : so, forward again, but coolly, timing his effort to the last gasp. And pray for the touch of cool metal. . . .

As he fell he seemed to hear a soft, deep chuckle. It was a loose prop thrown carelessly : but it formed the trap. He went floundering into darkness, his lamp flying as he spread out his hands, clutching darkness as a drowning man grabs water, threshing through the mist and the shadow . . . into deeper shadow. Until he crashed finally, his head bowed to earth.

He seemed to come to slowly, with a knowledge that he must fight. He lifted with a blinding agony in his brain. It was miracle but he was on his feet. Walking rapidly away, passing easily down the road. There in the shadow of the chock lay the figure still swathed in its pit-garments. But he felt nothing. Back yon he had discarded all responsibility, and now he was free to pass, and feel nothing. Swiftly down the level, as lightly as wind through trees. Here the return-wheel unwinding its silver streamers of steel. He remembered no pit ascent. Only that the light in this huge vault of pit

'bottom was a strange dynamo blue, licking tongues of blue flame spurting from the lamps. But he was out. Into the saffron light, the village before him flooded with sunshine. The path to home was over this blood-red ash. All the streets were silent, deserted; but the walls gleamed like copper; everywhere a flash of glass; everything burnished, the sky, the fields, the whole world. The doors were hermetically sealed. But he stared through the windows until he found the woman. There she stood, smiling, her face honey-coloured: and beside her a girl-child whose hair was as spun gold. They smiled at him, and beckoned a welcome. . . .

Gas dream is very sweet—

## VI

And the miner lay in his bed staring down the deep, wide valley. Great swathes of sunshine fell flat on the fields, and the deep-blue hills beyond Chesterfield pierced the white rolling clouds. Sparrows twittered on the slates, and he could hear a throaty gurgle when the pigeons crooned. Whenever his wife moved down there in the little kitchen her dress swished softly making rustle like leaves falling. The wind wafting in at the window held the faint sweet smell of ripening corn.

He liked to see the purple flowers on the cutting side, timber in the yard glowing yellow, the wagons slipping down to the screens, one by one, until they were out of sight . . . he liked to watch these things because they were part of him. But best of all he liked to hear his wife's voice when she talked to him about the life to come: a new, rich life.

'No more pit-work,' she would cry. 'Never again!'

'Ho, no!' she would say. 'Naught o' that. In future we call no man master.'

He liked to feel the soft cool touch of her fingers when she stooped to press away the lines from his forehead. If he could only burst the bubble, be free, clear of the walls and the whisperings in that hollow shell . . . sixpence a week and you can die nicely. And other things more insistent still rising to the surface of his mind like scum on dark waters: Fence and deputy, NO ROAD traced in letters of fire. When she was not there, and the valley seemed mirage and he himself a phantom, these visitations predominated driving into his head like steel wedges. They said—what did they not say?—that a man in extremity feels no pain, and the arms work on. Then he would know the deep desire to pluck and tear at the flowered coverlet: then the dark walls drew around him more densely so that he could hardly breathe, and the deepest urge of all would assail him—he must gear up his pick. . . . Air must flow!



